

Mental health implication of nomadic influx and rural banditry in North-Central Region of Nigeria

¹Tiku Oru Takim, ²Obeten, Ude Bassey, ³Asongo, Tersoo & ⁴Nsing Nuku Nkomo

^{1&3}Department of Social Work, University of Calabar, Nigeria

³Department of Criminology and Security Studies University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

⁴Department of Soil Science University of Calabar, Calabar Nigeria

¹udeobeten@Unical.edu.ng +2348037127382: ORCID ID 0000-0003-3457-8444

²talk2asongots@gmail.com +234813979297952

Abstract

This study explores the mental health implication of nomadic influx and rural banditry in the north-central region of Nigeria. The persistent influx of nomadic groups, coupled with escalating rural banditry and criminality has profoundly disrupted the socio-economic fabric of the region. Through secondary sources of data collection, the research examines the distress experienced by affected populations and its effect on the Nigerian State. The findings reveal heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among residents, exacerbated by the frequent and unpredictable nature of attacks. Community cohesion has deteriorated, leading to a pervasive sense of insecurity and mistrust. The study underscores the necessity for comprehensive mental health interventions, enhanced security measures, and policies aimed at fostering social integration and resilience. Addressing these psychological impacts is crucial for restoring stability and promoting sustainable development in the north-central region of Nigeria.

Keywords: Disruption of cultural continuity, mental health, stress

Introduction

The North-central region of Nigeria, encompassing states like Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, and Plateau, has become a focal point for the interplay between nomadic influx and rural banditry, leading to significant psychological repercussions and disruption of social activities, therefore impeding the growth and development of the region. These phenomena, driven by environmental changes and socio-economic factors, have exacerbated tensions and conflicts, resulting in severe mental health challenges, chronic stress, and disruptions in cultural continuity among the local populations. Nomadic influx primarily involves the migration of pastoralists, often due to desertification and resource scarcity in their traditional grazing areas in the northern regions or neighboring countries. This migration frequently leads to conflicts with sedentary farming communities over land and water resources (Blench, 2010). Most often these herders allow their herds to eat-up and destroy crops, causing food insufficiency and insecurity. Such conflicts have intensified within the north-central region of Nigeria, causing casualties, property destruction, and pervasive fear and anxiety within these communities and overall disruption of economic life of the people and is capable of stampeding the growth and development of the nation on a large scale.

Rural banditry is characterized by armed groups and non-state actors engaging in activities like cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery and arms deals, and violent attacks, further amplifying the insecurities in the region and escalating food insecurities (Okoli & Agada, 2014). The criminality and activities of these non-state actors are detrimental to the growth and development of the region and Nigeria in general. The psychological toll of these activities includes not only immediate trauma from violent encounters but also long-term mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression (Adamu & Ben, 2017). The continuous threat of violence creates an environment of chronic stress, adversely affecting the overall well-being of the affected populations and their productivity level.

The psychological impact of these issues is profound and multifaceted. Mental health and well-being are severely compromised as individuals grapple with the trauma of violence and displacement. Chronic stress from the constant threat of attack disrupts daily life and

hinders social and economic activities, leading to a cycle of poverty and instability as well as food insecurity (Nwankwo et al., 2021). The disruption of cultural continuity is another critical aspect, as displacement and violence erode traditional social structures, leading to identity crises and loss of cultural heritage.

Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to these psychological impacts. Disruptions in their education and development due to displacement, and insecurity further entrench the cycle of poverty and reduce future opportunities (Nwankwo et al., 2021). Moreover, the breakdown of community cohesion and traditional support systems exacerbates feelings of isolation and helplessness among the affected populations. Understanding the psychological impact of the nomadic influx and rural banditry in North-central Nigeria requires a comprehensive approach that considers mental health, chronic stress, and cultural continuity. Addressing these challenges necessitates integrated interventions that enhance community resilience, provide mental health promotion and support, and restore cultural and social cohesion.

Literature review

The North-Central region of Nigeria has experienced significant socio-political upheavals due to nomadic influx and rural banditry. These events have profound psychological impacts on the local populations, influencing stress levels, mental health, wellbeing, and cultural continuity. This review synthesizes existing literature on these variables, exploring the multifaceted impacts on affected communities. Some research highlights that the influx of nomadic groups and the resultant conflicts with indigenous populations induce substantial stress. Stress manifests in various forms, including fear of attacks, loss of property, and displacement. For instance, Adeoye (2020) found that communities experiencing frequent banditry attacks exhibit higher levels of psychological distress, characterized by anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The psychological impact extends to broader mental health and wellbeing concerns. Displacement and violence disrupt the social fabric and economic activities, leading to increased incidences of mental health disorders. According to Omoaregba (2018), affected individuals report higher rates of depression and anxiety, exacerbated by the loss of livelihoods and social support networks. Furthermore, continuous exposure to violence and uncertainty contributes to chronic stress, which can lead to long-term psychological issues. The nomadic influx and banditry also disrupt cultural continuity and environmental sustainability. Indigenous communities in North-Central Nigeria have rich cultural traditions that are undermined by displacement and violence. Akinkuolie (2019) notes that the forced migration of communities leads to the erosion of traditional practices and loss of cultural heritage. This disruption not only affects the community's identity but also their psychological resilience, as cultural practices often play a crucial role in coping mechanisms.

The interplay between stress, mental health, and cultural disruption creates a complex psychological landscape. Stress from violence and displacement directly impacts mental health, while the loss of cultural continuity exacerbates feelings of disorientation and loss. This multifaceted impact is evidenced by studies like that of Oladimeji (2017), who report that communities with strong cultural ties exhibit better psychological resilience, suggesting that preserving cultural continuity could mitigate some of the adverse mental health effects.

The psychological impacts of nomadic influx and rural banditry in North-Central Nigeria are profound and multifaceted, affecting stress levels, mental health, wellbeing, and cultural continuity. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that includes mental health support, stress management interventions, and efforts to preserve cultural

heritage. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to understand the long-term impacts and the effectiveness of various intervention strategies.

Theoretical framework

This study adopted the social disorganization theory. Social Disorganization Theory, initially developed by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1929), posits that crime and deviance are most likely to occur in communities with weakened social structures. The primary assumptions of this theory include:

1. **Community structure:** The organization and stability of a community's social structures, such as family, education, and local governance, are critical in maintaining social order and preventing crime.
2. **Social cohesion:** Strong social bonds and cohesion within a community facilitate collective efficacy, where members work together to achieve common goals and enforce norms.
3. **Institutional control:** Effective institutions, such as schools, religious organizations, and law enforcement, play a significant role in maintaining social order.
4. **Environmental influences:** Physical and social environments, including economic status, population turnover, and ethnic heterogeneity, influence the likelihood of social disorganization.
5. **Transmission of values:** Stable communities transmit prosocial values and norms to younger generations, whereas disorganized communities fail to do so, leading to increased deviance and crime.

The theory is relevant to this study because in North-Central Nigeria, the influx of nomadic groups disrupts established community structures, leading to weakened social networks and reduced institutional control. This disruption creates an environment of uncertainty and insecurity, contributing to heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. For example, the constant fear of bandit attacks and resource conflicts with nomads increases stress and mental strain on community members, who may feel unsupported and vulnerable due to weakened community ties. The erosion of social cohesion due to frequent conflicts and violence results in diminished collective efficacy. Individuals may feel isolated and less connected to their community, exacerbating feelings of loneliness and helplessness. For instance, the breakdown of trust within communities, where neighbours become suspicious of one another, further isolates individuals and undermines their mental well-being.

The physical and social environments in North-Central Nigeria, marked by economic hardship and population turnover due to nomadic movements and banditry, create high levels of stress. The instability of these environments makes it difficult for residents to achieve a sense of security and stability, and further exacerbate food insecurity as many farmers are deprived and not allowed to attend to their farms because of the activities and fear of the bandits. Bandits even collect money or food items from the farmers before they are allowed to farm. Evidence indicate that constant displacement due to banditry forces families to relocate frequently, leading to chronic stress and a lack of stable living conditions, which negatively impacts mental health. The weakening of local institutions, such as law enforcement and community governance, due to ongoing conflicts, reduces the community's ability to manage stress and maintain order. The perceived ineffectiveness of these institutions to protect residents from violence and economic instability increases stress levels. For example, the inability of local

authorities to prevent bandit attacks or resolve conflicts with nomadic groups leads to a sense of abandonment and elevated stress among community members. The local communities are in constant fear and most often they lose their means of livelihood because of the displacement and attacks.

Social disorganization in North-Central Nigeria disrupts the transmission of cultural value and traditions. The continuous state of conflict and displacement hinders the ability of older generations to pass down cultural practices, leading to a loss of cultural identity among younger generations. One of the examples is that traditional ceremonies and communal gatherings, essential for cultural continuity, are often interrupted or abandoned due to safety concerns, resulting in a disconnection from cultural heritage. The breakdown of community structures due to nomadic influx and banditry weakens the mechanisms that support cultural continuity. Schools, religious institutions, and family units are disrupted, impairing their role in reinforcing cultural norms and values. Displaced families may struggle to maintain their cultural practices in new environments, and children growing up in such unstable conditions may not learn or value their cultural heritage as previous generations did.

The application of Social Disorganization Theory to the mental health psychological implication of nomadic influx and rural banditry in North-Central Nigeria reveals how the breakdown of social structures and cohesion contributes to mental health issues, increased stress, and the disruption of cultural continuity. The theory underscores the importance of strong community networks, effective institutions, and stable environments in maintaining social order and well-being.

Conclusion

The nomadic influx and rural banditry in the North-central region of Nigeria have profound psychological impacts on the affected communities and rural economies. These phenomena contribute significantly to mental health challenges, heightened stress levels, depression and the disruption of cultural continuity. The psychological trauma experienced by individuals, families, and communities' manifests in various forms, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and a pervasive sense of insecurity. The frequent displacement and loss of livelihoods exacerbate these issues, leading to a cycle of poverty and mental distress. The influx and the activities of nomadic herders directly affect food security, and the growth and development of the rural space. The influx of nomadic groups often leads to competition over scarce resources, resulting in conflicts that further strain the mental health and well-being of the rural populace. The continuous threat of banditry, characterized by violence, kidnappings, and loss of property, disrupts daily life and instills a chronic state of fear and stress among residents. Additionally, the erosion of cultural traditions and social structures due to displacement and violence undermines the community's identity and resilience, exacerbating psychological distress.

Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations:

1. There is need for mental health support and counseling services and social work interventions. The government should establish accessible mental health facilities and mobile clinics in affected areas to provide psychological counseling and support and also train community health workers and local leaders in basic mental health care and trauma response to ensure immediate assistance is available especially to the displaced persons who have lost their means of livelihood.
2. The government should develop community-based programmes that focus on building resilience and coping mechanisms, incorporating traditional practices and modern

psychological technique, and again promote social cohesion and reconciliation initiatives to address communal conflicts and restore trust within and between communities.

3. There is need for cultural preservation initiatives. The government provides support initiatives aimed at preserving and revitalizing cultural practices and traditions disrupted by nomadic influx and banditry and also facilitate inter-cultural dialogue and understanding to mitigate tensions between nomadic and settled communities.

References

- Adamu, A., & Ben, A. (2017). The psychological impact of rural banditry on women and children in Northern Nigeria. *Journal of Social Sciences and Public Policy*, 9(2), 54-67.
- Adeoye, O. T. (2020). Psychological distress among victims of banditry in North-Central Nigeria. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 64(3), 512-533.
- Akinkuolie, O. A. (2019). Cultural erosion and psychological resilience among displaced communities in Nigeria. *Cultural Studies Review*, 25(1), 87-102.
- Blench, R. (2010). Conflict between pastoralists and cultivators in Nigeria. *Review of African Political Economy*, 37(123), 121-134.
- Nwankwo, C. H., Ukwueze, E. R., & Okeke, G. N. (2021). The mental health implications of insecurity in Nigeria: A study of North-Central region. *African Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(4), 92-107.
- Okoli, A. C., & Agada, F. A. (2014). Kidnapping and rural banditry in Northern Nigeria: An exposition. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science*, 14(8), 1-12.
- Oladimeji, Y. M. (2017). Cultural continuity and psychological resilience in conflict zones: A study of North-Central Nigeria. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 45(5), 603-619.
- Omoaregba, J. O. (2018). Mental health consequences of rural banditry and displacement in Nigeria. *African Journal of Psychiatry*, 21(4), 219-229.