

# **SUSTAINING EDUCATION OF THE SURVIVORS OF INSURGENCY IN THE NORTH-EAST NIGERIA THROUGH PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT**

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## **Abstract**

North-eastern Nigeria in recent times have been affected by insecurity. The development has caused many learning institutions to be closed down. This nasty development has caused trauma, depression and anxiety among the fortunate survivors. Some survivors are maimed, while others are languishing in pains over the losses incurred. These survivors either live in internally displaced persons' camps or are taking refuge with relatives elsewhere. Some are not sure of tomorrow and continue to live in persistent fear. In this paper, the writers are of the view that psychosocial support is required as a means to ensuring the continuous education and survival of these needy populace in the north-eastern states of Nigeria. The paper therefore gives some reasons that necessitate psychosocial support and also gives recommendations such as reconstruction of the damaged institutions, group team activities, recruitment and posting of counsellors, psychologists and teachers to the affected places. Provision of vocational/technical education, and provision of the basic necessities of life.

**Keywords:** Sustaining, survivors, insurgency, psychosocial

## **Introduction**

Nigeria, especially the north-eastern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe and Yobe have witnessed and is witnessing unprecedented security challenges by either Boko Haram insurgency or herdsmen attacks. Many lives are lost and residential houses and properties are destroyed. The surviving populace take refuge with either relatives or are living in internally displaced persons' camps. The Internally Displaced Monitoring Center (IDMC, 2013) in the report lamented that, continuing attacks in the north-east Nigeria has displaced not less than 63,000 people. The report went on to say that the attacks has led not only to loss of lives but also destruction of properties worth billions of money, damage infrastructure, loss of investment and income. This development has a long standing impact on the survivors of the attacks including the students at various levels of learning. According to Abdullahi and Atsua (2017), the survivors live in anxiety disorder characterized by intense fear of embarrassment, humiliation and negative evaluation by others in social situations and the tendency to avoid feared situations. Similarly, Tseuve and Likita (2017) highlighted some of the plights of these survivors especially those living in the internally displaced persons' camps to include: depression, fear of all kinds, deprivation of adequate shelter, food and health services, sexual harassment and abduction, lack of educational opportunities/ skills acquisition programmes and poor medical facilities. In another development, the report by Amusan (2016), reported that the United Nations expressed concern that both the released Chibok girls and the displaced persons suffer discrimination and are facing rejection by their communities because of their association with Boko Haram. The report gave instances that, often times people make such comments as; 'you are a Boko Haram wife, don't come near us'.

All these and many more require the psychosocial support for victims and survivors of the insurgency in the north-eastern Nigeria. Psychosocial support has become imperative to help and enhance their resilience and further education.

Psychosocial support is defined by the Gombe State Education Investment Project (2018) as approaches aimed at assisting or helping victims of disaster, catastrophe or violence to foster resilience of communities and individuals. It aims at easing resumption of moral life, facilitating affected peoples' participation into their convalescence and preventing pathological consequences of potentially traumatic situations. It is all forms of assistance aimed at helping people to psychologically and socially adjust to challenging situations.

### **Why psychosocial support for the survivors of Insurgency?**

As earlier stated, places attacked by the insurgency and herdsmen are in shambles. Many of these people are exposed to series of protection risks. According to Amusan (2016), the following are some of the plights of these people that warrant psychosocial support:

- **Depression**

Most of the survivors are psychologically depressed and traumatized following their horrific experiences during and after the attacks. Most of them incurred losses such as houses, sources of income, loss of relatives, parents, wives, children, friends and other valuables.

- **Stigmatization**

Stigma is a negative judgment against a person or a group. It is the extreme disapproval of, or discontent with a person or a group because of something that distinguishes them from others (Government of Sierra Leone, 2015: 53). As reported by Amusan (2016), after the release of victims of Boko Haram especially the Chibok girls, they suffer rejection from other members of the society and are stigmatized.

- **Shame**

Shame is an individual's feeling of being defective, unacceptable or damaged. It is a feeling that "I am something wrong". Many of the survivors feel shame within and are down casted. For them to be revived, something need to be done for them to overcome the shame, psychosocial support needs to be given to them to feel worthy.

- **Fears**

Residents, especially in the internally displaced persons' camps and where attacks have been made live in persistent fear because some of the inhabitants' behaviour are similar to those of the terrorists or they may be attacked again. The constant living in fear creates unease and lack of trust among the people.

- **Insomnia**

According to Denga (2015), insomnia is a sleep disorder which is characterized by inability to fall or stay asleep. He lamented that though insomnia is both found in children and adults, it is unreported. Insomnia appears to be common to people who experience horrific situations. To this end, survivors of insurgency might be suffering from insomnia and other related sleep disorders such as sleep walking (somnambulism), hypersomnia and night terrors, yet in silence.

- **Insufficient basic necessities of life**

Deprivation of basic services like adequate shelter, food, health services, educational opportunities and skills acquisition programmes appears to be common among the areas once attacked by the insurgents. These and many more not identified here may be regarded as the need for psychosocial support of the teeming population.

The Government (Federal and states), private individuals, organizations, religious and international communities have been trying hard to bring relief to the survivors. Notable of some of the efforts are: the setting up of National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). NEMA coordinates resources to-

wards efficient and effective disaster prevention and disaster risk reduction; for instance, the United Kingdom in 2016 donated the sum of \$32 million as humanitarian and energy support to the people affected by conflicts (Ikumola, 2016). The Sultan Foundation for Peace and Development (SFPD) also donated foodstuff, toiletries and other items to the internally displaced persons in Borno and Yobe States. Also worth mentioning is the psychosocial support for the internally displaced persons offered by the Federation of Muslim Women Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN). The mission of the association include: Promoting Peace education in islamiya schools, reducing stigma against those affected by Boko Haram, supporting vulnerable communities and conflicts sensitive reintegration and provision of food stuff and clothing (FOMWAN, 2015). The afore mentioned efforts are in line and timely in helping the survivors, but more is expected to be done especially in form of psychosocial support.

- **Psychosocial Support Activities/ forms.**

Psychosocial support helps individuals and communities to heal the psychological wounds and rebuild social structures destroyed after an emergency or a critical event. It can help change people into active survivors than being passive victims.

Gombe State Education Investment (2015) itemized two major approaches to helping in the crisis affected areas to be adopted by schools and teachers in helping learners become well psychologically, emotionally, socially, cognitively, physically and economically. These approaches are:

- **Healing Classroom Approach**

Healing classroom approach is designed to develop and strengthen the role that schools and teachers in particular play in promoting the psychosocial recovery and wellbeing of children and youths in general. This approach encourages an inclusive approach to education of all learners irrespective of gender, ethnic origin, disabilities, socio-economic status and family background. The approach focuses on expanding and supporting the positive role that teachers play in making and maintaining “healing” learning spaces.

### **Social Emotional Learning**

This approach emphasizes the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions (emotional intelligence), establish and maintain positive relationships. The aim of these approaches is to help mitigate the adverse effects of these stresses on students’ learning and wellbeing, and to create safe and healing spaces in which learners can recover, grow and develop.

According to Tseuve and Likita (2017:52), the following ways can be of help in helping the survivors after the horrific experiences of losses:

#### **Setting of Goals**

This entails helping people set up new goals that are realistic for themselves and are achievable. It is important to note that many of the surviving population were once engaged in one form of economic activity or the other. When their plans were truncated by the insurgency, they were rendered helpless. Helping them to set up new goals and achieving the goals can bring success, courage and healing to them.

#### **Building Relationships**

The focus here is to help people become aware of their relationships with others and to also note that relationship with others is a reflection of their own feeling about themselves. Trust and mutual understanding can bring relief to them.

### Accepting responsibility for the future

This approach entails helping people to develop skills in social and personal skills, forecasting and acquiring attitudes necessary for future. The aim is to help people increase their understanding and acceptance of themselves, the physical development, intelligence, aptitudes, interest, values, aspirations and lifestyle preferences and above all, their needs which help them highly motivated to behave positively and do something that will help them and others.

### Accepting the Reality

The emphasis here is to help people accept the condition and learn to admit the problem they are facing. The survivors should be made to understand that the problem they are facing is not applicable to them alone but some people elsewhere are also in similar situations. In this way, they might take solace in the group they are identified with, especially for those in the camps. Their tensions are reduced and together they try to adjust to the situation.

### Community Support Services

This approach entails provision of opportunities for social integration and unity. The importance of this technique is to restore trust, confidence, enhance resilience and re-establish relationships.

The actions here include re-creational activities, youth clubs, traditional /religious ceremonies, drama, art and family support work. Stressing the importance of the approach, the Government of Sierra Leone (2015) says “play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning but for young people, play is serious learning”. Play is not just something children do to take a break from learning, play is critical for their psychosocial support, well-being and development.

### Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation involves programmes put in place to assist people to develop healthy attitude towards an independent life. Rehabilitation provides learning situation which aims at decreasing the disabilities and aiding the abilities of people. In the displaced camps, after resettlement in their previous residential centers, most of the displaced people might have or involve in vocations where they get income to support life. These group of people should be taught different skills considering the age, interest of vocation such as basketry, book binding, carpentry, needle work, pottery, fabric printing, spinning, painting, music, drama and so forth. Recommending rehabilitation as a psychosocial support, Denga (2015) says these activities help the people to be useful to themselves and to the society and not to be a liability to anybody. They should be helped to understand that they too are helping to meet the demands of the society.

Audu, Mshelia and Maina (2017) identified Rational Emotive Therapy as a useful therapy in helping people who experience horrific and traumatic situations. Rational Emotive Therapy was developed by Albert Ellis. This psychotherapeutic approach believes that what disturbs man is not the event itself but the interpretation of it. People affected by insurgency are emotionally disturbed and are vulnerable to emotional disturbance when their demands are not met and even when their demands are met because the situation may change and their demands may no longer be met. It is true that people tend to get better when they change their ways of thinking about themselves, their problems and the work. Cheraghi and Tajar (2015) also agreed with this view, admitting that it is possible to overcome emotional problems such as anxiety, depression, shame, guilt, hurt, unhealthy feeling with the help of Rational Emotive Therapy (RET).

Another important psychosocial approach identified by Grammar and Post (2000) is that of cognitive restructuring. They posit that the bereaved traumatized will benefit from systematic programme of cognitive restructuring counselling. This is a counseling approach that will give the bereaved the opportunity to discuss problems with counsellors who have time and are willing to listen to them.

Ilomuanya and Iwuagwu (2017) also attest to this that some of the counselling needs which the bereaved, traumatized, especially the in-school students have to discuss with counsellors include: risk involved in emotional instability and academic mal-adjustment. When they are helped, they will gain insight and can dispute emotional trauma that causes injury to the psyche by coping normally. Moreover, cognitive restructuring counseling intervention will bring both the in-school youngsters and the displaced to the level of logical thinking and consciousness that will enable them to function adequately in their emotional and academic areas.

## Conclusion

This paper stressed the importance of psychosocial support to the survivors and communities affected by the insurgency in the North East Nigeria. In it, the plights of the survivors are discussed. It is seen that educational institutions are destroyed, sources of income are destroyed social institutions are affected, many lives are lost, children become orphans, why many parents become childless. The situation has caused so many mental scars and navigating the brutal recollections of the sad memories has created traumatic experiences and emotional debilitations. The Authors therefore suggest that psychosocial support should be rendered to the surviving population and the communities affected by the insurgency to revive their economy, education and their wellbeing generally.

## Recommendations

Based on the discussion, the following recommendations are drawn:

1. Government should build up the educational institutions destroyed by the insurgence in the affected areas.
2. Learning Institutions in the affected areas should be staffed with qualified teachers to ensure that the educational opportunities of the survivors are not withdrawn or neglected
3. Professionally trained counsellors and psychologists should be posted to the affected communities and the internally displaced persons' camps to provide the needed psychosocial support to the people who are traumatized and emotionally troubled.
4. The survivors in the affected communities should open up and discuss their worries with the humanitarian personnel working in the affected places to get help.
5. Government should beef up security in the affected areas to prevent further attacks.

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