



The Role of Social Support on Psychological Wellbeing of Victims of Herdsmen Attacks in Plateau State

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Abstract

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The impact of armed attacks at individual, family and community levels can be a sufficient limitation on the victim's ability to function and to cope with everyday life, as such, the need for an urgent intervention among the victims. This study investigates the role of Social Supports on psychological wellbeing of victims of herders attacks in Internally Displaced Camps in Plateau State, North Central Nigeria. A descriptive research design of ex-post-facto type was used in the study and 234 victims of herdsmen attacks participated in the study. There were 130 (55.6%) females and 104 (44.4%) males. The Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scales (PWB), and Scale Perceived Social Support were used to collect the data from the participants. The collected data was analyzed using simple regression analyses. The results for hypothesis one showed that psychological support significantly predicted psychological wellbeing among victims of herdsmen attack ($p < .05$). Hypothesis two show that there was no significant gender differences on psychological wellbeing among victims of herdsmen attacks in Barkin Ladi LGA, Means: Male, 1.47 (SD 1.50), Female, 1.46 (.50), $p > .05$. The findings showed Social Support significantly predicted psychological wellbeing among the victims of herdsmen attacks and as such, encouraged relevant authorities to step up modalities towards ameliorating the plights of victims through policies and their implementation that will ensure all those affected are provided with the needed social supports.

Keywords: Herdsmen, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Psycho-Social Support,

Introduction

Every event in the life of an individual influences his mental wellbeing in one way or the other. These events may range from family environment to societal happenings and could be either positive or negative life events. Nigeria is a country with over 180 million people cutting across the six geo-political zones with each zone having its peculiar problem which affects the entirety of human interaction and psychological wellbeing and by extension, the economy and life of the nation. One of such peculiar problems that appear more than every other problem currently ravaging the nation is that of armed attacks by herdsmen which resulted to the internal displacement of many away from their places of abodes.

A significant consequence of armed conflict and other situations of violence is their impact on the mental health and psychosocial well-being of the people affected. These armed herdsmen have ravaged many communities and villages that were once peacefully co-existing and life going normal. Many of these communities are today a shadow of themselves as the gory sights of such locations evokes unpleasant emotions. Recently in Northern Nigeria many of the states especially in North East and North Central regions have experience series of attacks from Boko Haram and the Armed Herdsmen. A typical example of such inhumanity to man is the attack on some villages in Benue, Nassarawa, and Niger States that leaves a score death and particularly in Plateau State that left over thousands of people death with thousands displaced, and unable to return to their villages due to threats and inability of the relevant government and security apparatus to contain the situation.

The psychological impacts of armed attacks at individual, family and community levels can be sufficiently serious to limit people's ability to function and to cope with everyday life (Ajiboye, 2013). Researchers have shown that there is a reduced capacity to respond to the social support needs generated by the emergency in communities that are experiencing crises (Akpunne, 2015; Colliard, et al., 2012; Koser, & Marsden, 2013; Mels, et al., 2010; Neria, et al., 2008; Rugira, et al., 2015). More than 1.5 million displaced persons are housed in overcrowded camps across the disturbed Northern states, which were mainly school facilities and empty government buildings with few basic amenities and characteristic deplorable living conditions. They have little or no attention from the government concerning the provision of basic elements of the human right such as healthcare, physical security, food, potable water, and education (Faronbia, et al., 2020).

Social support has been defined as the assistance or comfort to other people to help them cope with a variety of problems. Social support comes from interpersonal relationships, family members, neighbors, religious groups and friends which provides positive effect in times of stress (Sambu, 2015). Social support comes in the form of emotional reassurance that can be instrumental in helping out with the immediate tasks of daily living or provision of information about how to do something or deciding on the best course of actions to be taken (Kaniasty & Norris, 2009). Positive social support makes one feel confident that help is forthcoming or the pain will heal. It also facilitates access to material resources such as food, clothing and shelter, and to financial, educational, medical and employment assistance (Ungar et al., 2007).

Empirical literatures have shown that the availability of social support the psychological wellbeing of persons who have previously undergone trauma of some kind and that these supports help the victims to come to terms with certain aspects of their tragedy (Poudel, et al., 2020; Sambu, 2015; Tahir et al., 2015; Kugbey et al., 2015). This means that social supports helps individuals who are distressed due to traumatic life experiences to improve on their psychological wellness and to thrive in all other areas of life as a result. For example, Poudel et al., (2020) in a study that sought to find out the relationship between Perceived Social Support (PSS) and

Psychological Well-Being (PWB) among Nepalese adolescence based on mediating role of Self-esteem (SE) found that Perceived Social Support (PSS) indirectly affects Psychological Well-Being (PWB) of adolescents through mediating variable Self-esteem (SE) as participants who perceive good social support had higher Self-esteem (SE) which in turn contributed to their Psychological Well-Being (PWB) with no significant gender differences found for Perceived Social Support (PSS), Psychological Well-Being (PWB) and Self-esteem (SE).

Sambu (2015) in another study looked into the importance and effectiveness of social support in promoting resilience after trauma among Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Kenya with focus on survivors from Kiambaa fire incident after the 2007 general Elections. The study adopted a mixed method design approach. Findings from the study established that social support is a key element in building resilience in traumatized individuals with the results of the Pearson correlation analysis confirming a strong positive correlation between social support and resilience of individuals ($r=0.835$, $p<0.05$).

It has also been shown that individuals who are traumatized but provided with high social support have higher tendency to develop a better psychological wellbeing than those with low social support (Ozbay, et al., 2007; Sambu, 2015; Pietzak et al., 2009). The importance of social support is to developing good psychological wellbeing of individuals displaced by herdsmen attacks is therefore a major motivation behind this study which investigates the role of psychosocial supports on psychological wellbeing of victims of herdsmen attacks in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area of Plateau State.

Statement of the Problem

The herders-farmers clash in North Central part of Nigeria is a thing of concern to many cutting across government and non-governmental institutions. This is because the conflict has led to the lost of lives and properties worth billions of Naira. While the herders go grazing with their flocks, the farms are sometimes grazed by these animals, leaving the farmers with low or no output from their hard labour. These often leads to conflicts between the herders and the farmers. Of recent, hundreds of farmers were slaughtered in cold blood in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area (LGA) of Plateau State and thousands displaced from their homes as a result of the activities of the herders. Sophisticated weapons were often used to carry out the heinous acts (Adesuyan, 2016) while the perpetrators go unscathed. They execute their cruelty with such brutality that leaves a disturbing and gory image, with the communities left as shadow of their former self.

As the victims of these attacks flee to safety, they settle mostly in Internally Displaced Camps where they wait until everything return to normal. Due to these traumatic experiences, the victims psychological wellbeing is adversely affected (Rugira, 2015; Gichunge, et al., 2020). The need for this set of vulnerable IDPs to be given the needed supports by individuals, government and non-governmental bodies must be given utmost attention. Recent studies have shown that psycho-social supports given to victims of crises have significant impact on their psychological wellbeing (Gichunge, et al., 2020; Faronbia, et al., 2020). Interestingly, with the incessant attacks on various communities which has displaced people in their thousands with over 65 communities taken over from just three Local Government Areas including Barkin Ladi (Adeniyo, 2022), no study has investigated if the victims have received any form of psycho-social support and if there is any impact it has on their psychological wellbeing among the IDPs in Plateau State, especially, those in Barkin Ladi LGA. This study therefore investigates the role of psycho-social support on psychological wellbeing of victims of herdsmen attacks in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area of Plateau State.

Objectives of the Study

The major objective of this study is to investigate the role of Social Supports on Psychological Wellbeing on victims of herdsmen attacks in Plateau State, North Central Nigeria. Other specific objectives are:

1. To investigate the role of Social Supports on psychological wellbeing of victims of herdsmen attacks
2. To find out gender differences on psychological wellbeing of victims of herdsmen attacks.

Research Questions

1. What is the role of Social Supports on psychological wellbeing of victims of herdsmen attacks?
2. What are the gender differences on psychological wellbeing of victims of herdsmen attacks?

Method

Research Design

Descriptive research design of ex-post facto type was used in the study. There was no manipulation of any variable. Data were collected from the IDPs as they occur naturally.

Participants

There were an estimated 16,885 from Barkin Ladi LGA according to the Plateau State Emergency Management Agency (PLASEMA). 234 victims of herdsmen attacks were conveniently selected to participate in the study with 130 (55.6%) females and 104 (44.4%) males. Majority of the participants were between the ages of 20 years and below (107[45.7%]), followed by 21-30 years (88[37.6%]), 41-50 years (27 [11.5%]) and 51 years and above with 12 (5.1%). 169 (72.2%) were singles while 65 (27.8%) were married and majority were Christians, 195(83.3%) with 39 (16.7%) Muslims. Finally, majority of the participants went to only secondary schools, 182 (77.8%) followed by primary (26(11.1%) and tertiary institutions (26(11.1%).

Instruments

Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scales (PWB)

Psychological wellbeing scale (PWB) was developed by Carol Ryff (1989) a forty-two item instrument used to capture the psychological wellbeing and healthiness of the participants at a particular moment in time. The PWB Scale has six subscales: *Autonomy* (e.g., "I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus"); *Environmental Mastery* (e.g., "In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live"); *Personal Growth* (e.g., "I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world"); *Positive Relations With Others* (e.g., "People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others"); *Purpose in Life* (e.g., "Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them"); and *Self-acceptance* (e.g., "When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out"). Individuals respond to the various statements on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Higher scores on each scale indicate greater psychological healthiness and wellbeing on that dimension. All items are scored directly. Ryff (1989) reported the following Cronbach's alpha coefficients: .86 for autonomy, .90 for environment mastery, .87 for personal growth, .91 for positive relationship, .90 for purpose in life .93 for self-acceptance. The PWB Cronbach alpha reliability of the scale revealed ($\alpha = .95$), In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were found as follows: .72 for autonomy, .80 for environment mastery, .71 for personal growth, .85 for positive relationship, .93 for purpose in life and .81 for self-acceptance while the overall Cronbach alpha reliability of the scale was found as $\alpha = .89$, which indicates a high reliability coefficient.

The Multidimensional Scale Perceived Social Support

The Multidimensional Scale Perceived Social Support (Zimet, et al., 1990) was used to assess the social support of the victims. The twelve item scale measures perceived social support along three dimensions that are family, friends, and significant others in the form of a self-administered questionnaire. It is scored on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, to 4 = strongly agree. An example of the items is: “I enjoy the emotional support I need, and this community is sensitive to my personal needs.” Reported Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.94 for the full scale was reported (Rothon et al, 2011) while 0.92 was found in this study.

Procedure

The respondents were approached in the camp. After obtaining permission from the camp administrators, the participants were visited at the various camp locations, where the researchers introduced themselves and requested their consent to participate in the study. Only those that agreed and gave their consent participated. They were assured of confidentiality in handling their information. Respondents were provided with the copies of the questionnaire to fill. The average time spent for each participant to fill the questionnaire is 15 minutes, after which it was retrieved while the participants were appreciated for their time.

Methods of Data Analysis

The collected data was subjected to statistical analysis using the statistics package for social science (SPSS) version 25. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe the socio demographic characteristics of the participants. Simple regression analysis was used to test the prediction of Social Supports on psychological wellbeing.

Result**Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants**

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT %
GENDER		
Male	104	44.4
Female	130	55.6
Total	234	100.0
AGE		
<20	107	45.7
21-30	88	37.6
41-50	27	11.5
51>	12	5.1
Total	234	100.0
MARITALSTATUS		
Single	169	72.2
Married	65	27.8
Total	234	100.0
RELIGION		
Christianity	195	83.3
Islam	39	16.7
Total	234	100.0
EDUCATION		
Primary	26	11.1
Secondary	182	77.8
Tertiary	26	11.1
Total	234	100.0

Table 1 shows that 234 victims of herdsman attacks participated in the study. There were more females 130 (55.6%) compared to males with 104 (44.4%). Majority of the participants were between the ages of 20 years and below (107[45.7%]), followed by 21-30 years (88[37.6%]), 41-50 years (27 [11.5%]) and 51 years and above with 12 (5.1%). 169 (72.2%) were singles while 65 (27.8%) were married and majority were Christians, 195(83.3%) with 39 (16.7%) Muslims. Finally, majority of the participants went to only secondary schools, 182 (77.8%) followed by primary (26(11.1%) and tertiary institutions (26(11.1%) accordingly.

Hypotheses One

Social Support would significantly predict psychological wellbeing of victims of Herdsmen attacks in Barkin Ladi LGA

Table 3: Simple Regression Analysis showing the influence of psychological support on psychological wellbeing of victims of Herdsmen attacks.

Variable	R	R ²	F	β	t	p
Constant	.233 ^a	.054	80.477	.485	14.473	.000 ^b
Social Support					8.971	.000 ^b

a. Predictors: (Constant), Psych Support

The results presented in table 3 above showed that social support significantly predicted psychological wellbeing among victims of herdsmen attack ($R = .507 = R^2 = .258$, $F(1, 232) = 80.477$, $t = 8.971$, $p < .05$). This means that social support contributed 25.8% to variation in psychological wellbeing. This finding implies that higher level of social support of victims of herdsmen attack is likely to bring about higher degree of psychological wellbeing. Therefore, this hypothesis is therefore accepted.

Hypotheses Two

There would be a significant gender differences of victims of herdsmen attack on their psychological wellbeing.

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation for Gender and Psychological Wellbeing

	GENDER	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Psy. Wellbeing	Male	104	52.10	20.65
	Female	130	49.56	21.78

Table 5: T-test for Gender and Psychological Wellbeing

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Psy. Wellbeing	Equal variances assumed	.155	.694	.906	232	.366	2.54	2.80	-2.98	8.06
	Equal variances not assumed			.912	225.38	.363	2.54	2.78	-2.95	8.02

Result from table 4 and 5 showed that there were no significant gender differences on psychological wellbeing of those affected by herdsmen attack in Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State. Means: Male, 52.10 (20.65), Female, 49.56 (21.78), $p > .05$. The hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Discussion

The study investigated the role of social supports on psychological wellbeing of victims of herdsmen attacks in Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State, Nigeria. Two hypotheses were tested in the study.

The results support the hypothesis that social support will significantly predict psychological well-being among victims of herdsmen attacks. This result corroborates earlier research findings of Faronbia, et al., 2020 and Sambu 2015 that Social Support significantly predicted psychological well-being. The findings of the study showed that Social Support predicted the psychological wellbeing of those affected by the herdsmen attacks in Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State. Since the life of victims of herdsmen attacks has been found to be vulnerable, the presence social support may contribute significantly and positively in improving the psychological wellbeing of the victims. This finding lends credence to the work of scholars like Colliard, et al., (2012) and Poudel et al., (2020) who found that social support reduce the impact of psychological problems among their participants. This finding also corroborates with Gichunge, et al., (2020) who also found that psychological support could act as a protective factor that could decrease psychological problems and improve psychological wellbeing.

Furthermore, victims who are actively involved in their community, gainfully employed, and have other rewarding social contacts may have a sense of social integration. They may be more inclined to manifest poor psychological wellbeing. Several researchers have reported similar results (e.g., Gichunge, et al., 2020; Netshiombo, 2015). Social support acts as a resistance factor; that is, support reduces, or buffers, the adverse psychological impacts of exposure to negative life events such as the attacks by herdsmen experienced by the participants in this study. It is noteworthy that lack of social support and changes in social support over time are stressors in themselves, and as such ought to have direct influences upon psychological symptomatology, whether or not other stressful circumstances occur.

Social support may have reduced the potential effects of the attacks by enabling the victims to perceive such stressors as less threatening or stressful. Further, the perceived access to additional information (i.e., informational support) or resources (i.e., tangible support) to successfully deal with their current situations may have also increased victims sense of control over their distressing situation. Finally, social support in stressful events may have assisted in the development or maintenance of healthy behaviours (e.g., rest and relaxation) that resulted in increased physical and psychological resistance against the detrimental effects of stressors due to traumatic events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Additionally, the exacerbating effects of social support not only existed for the sources of support that would be able to alter the effects of the stressors, but also for sources of support that are less likely to be able to modify the extent of the stressor.

The hypothesis two showed that there was no gender difference in psychological wellbeing of the participants. The outcome is not consistent with the findings of Poudel et al., (2020), who showed that men had higher psychological wellbeing compared to their female counterparts. The findings of this study is an indication that both the males and female's propensity to develop higher psychological wellbeing as well as poor psychological wellbeing is irrespective of gender. Being a male for example, may not exempt an individual from manifesting

depression when faced with a traumatic life experience such as constant attacks by herdsmen. Also, the grieving due to the loss of a loved one may not be perceived or reacted to differently by either the male or female.

Recommendation

There is a need to provide psycho-social supports to victims of herdsmen attacks which will help in improving their psychological well-being. In future the current study could be replicated using larger groups of victims of herdsmen attacks from a greater variety of backgrounds and different states, to determine whether victims in different areas of Nigeria experience mental wellbeing differently. The present study could encourage future longitudinal studies, where researchers do not only assess the mental well-being of victims, but also the long-term effects that high/low levels of mental well-being in victims have on an individual's life. Detailed attention should also be given to increasing the functional coping strategies of victims while reducing the dysfunctional coping strategies used by them.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that it focused on just Barkin Ladi LGA. The replication of the current study in other areas of human functioning in the state or nation may be important in generalizing the results. Another limitation of the study is on the number of the variables studied. Other variables such as socioeconomic, family background and general wellbeing could also contribute to psychological well-being of the victims beyond the effect of social support. This study was based on an ex-post factor design. The exploration of social and psychological support and psychological wellbeing does not allow inferring causality from the present data. Therefore, these results need to be replicated to generalize the findings, preferably in a study with a longitudinal design.

Conclusion

The study investigated social support as predictors of psychological wellbeing for the victims of herdsmen attacks in Barkin Ladi LGA. The importance of social supports for victims cannot be overemphasized. It is also interesting to note that social support seems to be the most significant predictor of good psychological wellbeing among victims of herdsmen attacks while poor psycho-social supports lead to poor mental health or wellbeing among the participants. For this study, many of the participants live in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) Camps without good support from the government and the society at large and as such vulnerable to poor psychological wellbeing. The need for the government and other appropriate agencies to come to the aid of this vulnerable group is highly recommended. Altogether, the finding provides evidence that effort towards dealing with adverse effect of traumatic events such as the herdsmen attacks should be deemed as one of the critical success factors for enhancing victims' psychological wellbeing by the appropriate government and non-government agencies.

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