

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder among Secondary School Students in Benue State, North Central Nigeria

N. C. M. Achikasim

*Department of Training and Operations (DATOPS)
Nigerian Army Headquarters
Garki, Abuja
nikchidi@yahoo.com.au*

Abstract

This paper investigated the manifestation of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and its influence on the academic performance of secondary schools students in Benue State in the North Central zone of Nigeria. The population of the study consisted of 446 students from secondary schools in Benue State; while the sample size was 223 respondents, representing 50% of the population, drawn using proportionate sampling technique. Data collection was done using structured and validated questionnaire titled “Assessment of the Manifestation of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Secondary Schools (AMPTSDSS)”. Five research questions were answered in the study. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha formula and a reliability index of 0.89 was obtained. Data was analysed with descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage. Finding from the result indicates that PTSD exists in Benue State among secondary school students and it manifests as depression, emotional numbness, apprehension, absentmindedness, fear, nightmare and aggression amongst others. The study therefore recommended that the government and other stakeholders should strive to identify these students for early management.

Keywords: post-traumatic, stress, disorder, secondary, students, Benue

Introduction

A secure state and environment has been a highly valued goal and dream of any society. This, however, has been difficult to achieve because of different threats and risks in personal, community, state, national lives and global environments. According to Gaskia (2019), the existence and relationship of humans, both socio-economic and political, can lead to threats to peace and security of an individual or group or state with its attendant effects. Groups, individuals and societies can never at any time be hundred percent peaceful (Oche, 2011); hence humans are daily contending with security issues and striving to achieve peace. Wokocha (2014) also stated that contemporary world often faces both man-made tragedies and natural disasters that are largely the products of political, religious and socio-economic struggles. He further added that natural disasters of various types such as earthquakes, flood, thunderstorms and landslides, among others, threaten some areas and location of earth. There are equally diseases and epidemics, and “man’s cruelty to man”, according to Achikasim (2019), which are occasioned by acts of terrorism, ethnic wars, ritual killing, and cannibalism. At present, kidnapping, abduction

and herdsmen invasion with ethnic militia attacks are common occurrences in many parts of African Nations especially in some regions of Nigeria.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is associated with the failure to recuperate, according to Kaysen, Resick and Wise (2003), after undergoing or witnessing a frightening incident in one's life. It is a severe mental state that some people develop after a dreadful, scary, or hazardous occurrence (Birmes, Hatton, Brunet & Schmitt, 2003). The situation could last for a shorter period or longer time depending on the individual and the management styles adopted towards stabilising the victim (Stein, Comer, Gardner & Kelleher, 1999). This, as stated by Kaysen, Rosen, Bowman and Resick (2009), may re-occur occasionally bringing back the feelings and memories of the ugly experience followed by severe emotional and negative bodily responses.

Some of these inhuman acts experienced in different regions and states in Nigeria not only put these populations in danger but could leave the children and youth who are the most vulnerable, in perpetual emotional apprehension as reported by Olugbode (2012), which might make them candidates of post traumatic problems after such crises situation as opined by Reifman, McIntosh and Elliworth (2000). Through intermittent but consistent threats of these ugly incidences affected victims, secondary school students in particular can be at significant risk, which may involve mostly psychological stress, fear and trauma, unlike the adults (Rivera & Smith, 1997). The effects of these traumatic experiences may affect their performance in school and later development when not properly managed. Mohlen, Parzer, Resch and Brunner (2005) were of the view that such may lead to physical injury similar to adults, but the adolescents' psychological reaction to trauma may differ from adults' as a result of their shifting developmental stages, adjustment abilities and inability to seek healing and management when necessary. Bakar and Kabiru (2018), equally gave credence to the above in their appreciation of traumatic effects of painful incidents in an individual's life. According to Poirer (2012), the adolescent's manifestation of trauma-related signs might be quite different from mature adults due to the tolerance level of individuals over time. Same was attested to by Blanchard-Fields, Stein and Watson (2004), in their work on age difference. Yule (2001) also opined that these signs and symptoms may likely change from time due to their changing physical and emotional development as a result of age.

Currently in Nigeria, the prevention and containment of insecurity in schools has become one of the major socio-economic challenges of the Government and main thrust upon which politicians campaign for votes, while critics and social commentators use it to win sympathy of the citizens (Owonikoko, 2021). This is still a challenge to the present administration in Nigeria as she is striving to contain the crises and also wants the displaced and frightened students to return to schools they have rebuilt after the crises, but without proper consideration of the students' post crises psychological and emotional state.

Consequently, this paper therefore, would take a cursory look at the post crises psychological state of the secondary school students and the manifestation of post-traumatic stress disorder among them in the North Central Region of Nigeria especially Benue State where there have been boundary clashes as well as herdsman and farmers disputes which have led to destruction of so much human and material resources as well as displacement of people and communities.

Statement of the problem

The North Central Region of Nigeria especially Benue State in recent times has witnessed series of socio-economic and violent conflicts which has led to great loss of human and material resources. These include boundary clashes, kidnapping, abduction and herdsman invasion with ethnic militia attacks. In many of these, people have been killed, maimed, houses burnt with human beings inside, school buildings and worship places burnt or destroyed, farmland and animals destroyed. These have led to displacement of groups and communities, individuals and communities leaving them as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in their own states and neighbouring states (Joda & Abdurashed, 2015). During these crises, some of the children and youths of Secondary School age witnessed the killing of their loved ones in their presence; some were awakened at the dead of the night to see their house burning which began their entrance into IDP camps while others sustained injuries of different magnitude, as reported by Ogbebo (2014) and Ameh (2016). These experiences might have left in these youths after the crises various degrees of psychological and emotional challenges (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) associated with conflicts where they are victims. Such could manifest months and years after the crises which if left unidentified and treated might affect the development of these youths negatively and the society at large. This work therefore is set to identify the Post Traumatic Stress Disorders among Secondary School Students in Benue State Nigeria where the State has been experiencing violent inter-communal clashes, militia attacks and famers/herdsman conflicts. These crises have claimed so much human and material resources of the state with many rendered homeless and attracting other side effects to individual citizens of the state especially the adolescents who are in the secondary schools.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the Post Traumatic Stress Disorders among Secondary School Students in three Local Government Areas in Benue State. Hence the specific objectives of the work include:

1. Establish the existence Post Traumatic Stress Disorder among Secondary school students in three Local Government Areas in Benue State of Nigeria.
2. Ascertain if the existence of the PTSD influenced the performance of the Secondary School Students in Benue State.
3. Confirm if there is any difference in the Performance of male and female secondary school students in Benue State as a result of PTSD.
4. Determine if there is any age difference in the performance of the Secondary School Students in Benue State of Nigeria due to PTSD.

5. Ascertain if there is any difference in the influence of PTSD on the secondary school students in Benue State of Nigeria due to their religion.

Research questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. Was there existence of PTSD in secondary school students in Benue State of Nigeria?
2. Did the students manifest observable symptoms of the PTSD in the Secondary School?
3. Was there any difference in performance of students in secondary Schools in Benue state due to the existence of PTSD?
4. What is the difference in the performance of male and female secondary school students in Benue State of Nigeria as a result of PTSD?
5. To what extent does PTSD influence the academic performance of secondary school students in Benue State when segregated by age?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. This was necessary to be able to explain the variables in the study based on information gathered. The study was carried out in all the secondary schools in Benue State where the host communities have witnessed one form of violent conflicts such as farmers and herdsmen clashes, boundary and land disputes where human and material resources were destroyed. These areas include Agatu, Guma, Kwande, Okpokwu, Obi and Vandekya Local Government Areas of the State.

The population of the study consisted of 446 students from these secondary schools in Benue State. A sample size of 223 respondents was drawn from all the secondary schools in these areas which represent 50% of the population using proportionate sampling technique. Primary method of data collection was used for the study through structured and validated questionnaire. A questionnaire titled Assessment of the Manifestation of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Secondary Schools (AMPTSDSS) was the instrument used. It consisted of three sections. Section A has 6 items on the existence of PTSD and its symptoms. Section B: 5 items on Students' behaviours manifestations/attitudes in relation to the symptoms of PTSD. Section C: 7 items on student's performance in their studies according to sex in relation to influence of PTSD. These performance scores were derived from the academic scores of the sampled students which were obtained from the schools used for the investigation.

The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha formula to correlate the response of 35 students that were part of the population but not part of the final study sample. The reliability analysis yielded a reliability index of 0.89 which was considered sufficient for the study, according to Denga (1998). Completed copies of the instrument (AMPTSDSS) were collected, analysed with descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage through the use of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.0.

Presentation of results

The analysis of data in relation to each of the research questions are presented in Tables 1- 5.

Research question 1: Was there existence of PTSD in secondary school students in Benue State of Nigeria?

Table 1: Percentage and Frequency Scores of PTSD Manifestations in Secondary Schools in three LGAs in Benue State

S/No.	PTSD Manifestation	Frequency	Percentage
1	Emotional numbness	23	10.75
2	Mood changes	13	6.07
3	Eating disorder	8	2.90
4	Extreme fear	58	25.97
5	Aggression	119	55.61
6	Substance abuse	2	0.95

The result presented in table 1 shows that 10.75% of the students in secondary schools in Benue State display emotional numbness in their activities in the school, 6.07% show mood changes, 2.90% transfer their emotions to food, 25.97% live in extreme fear daily due to their past experience, 55.61% are very aggressive in their dealings within the school while 0.95% indulge in substance abuse.

Research question 2: Did the students manifest observable symptoms of the PTSD in the Secondary School

Table 2: Percentage and frequency scores of PTSD observable symptoms in secondary schools in three LGAs in Benue State

S/No.	Observable Symptoms	Frequency	Percentage
7	Depression	42	20.72
8	Flash back	39	17.15
9	Avoidance of people and assumed situations/ Lack of interest in things enjoyed before	36	16.15
10	Nightmares	33	18.07
11	Apprehension	32	14.95
12	High reaction to stimuli	17	7.95
13	Deep thoughts/absentmindedness	09	5.00

The result in table 2 reveals that 20.72% of students manifest signs of depression, 17.15% show symptoms of flash back of their past experience, 16.15% of the students display avoidance tendencies and situations they assume to be like their last experience and dislike for the things they previously enjoyed by them, 18.07% have nightmares of the past, 14.95% display apprehension in their daily activities, 7.95% have high reactivity to stimuli, while 5.00% are usually found in deep thought and absentmindedness.

Research question 3: Was there any difference in performance of students in secondary Schools in Benue state due to the existence of PTSD

Table 3: Percentage and frequency scores of secondary schools students due to PTSD

S/No.	Academic Performance Scores	Frequency	Percentage
14	30 and Below	50	22.42
15	35 - 40	44	19.42
16	40 – 50	36	16.15
17	50 -60	30	13-45
18	60 – 70	22	9.87
19	70 – 80	17	7.95
20	80 - Above	09	5.00

The result of the table 3 indicates that 22.42% scored between 30% and below in their overall performance, 19.73% scored between 35-40, 16.15% in their performance scored between 40-50. Also 13-45% of the students scored between 50-60 average, 9.87% of students scored 60-70 in their performance and 7.95% of the students scored between 70-80 while only 5.00% scored 80 and above.

Research Question 4: What is the difference in the performance of male and female secondary school students in Benue State of Nigeria as a result of PTSD?

Table 4: Percentage and frequency scores of secondary schools students according to sex due to PTSD

S/No.	Academic Score	Performance	No. of male and frequency %	No. of female and frequency %	
21	30 and Below	22	9.86	28	12.55
22	35 – 40	21	9.41	23	10.31
23	40 – 50	17	7.62	19	8.52
24	50 – 60	13	5.82	17	7.62
25	60 - 70	10	4.48	12	5.38
26	70 – 80	7	3.13	9	4.03
27	80 and Above	03	1.35	06	2.69

The result of the table 4 indicates that 9.86% males score between 30% and below and 12.55% female scored same in their overall performance, 9.41% males scored between 35-40 and 10.31% females did same, 7.62% males and 8.52% females in their performance scored between 40-50. Also 5.82% of the male and 7.62% female students scored between 50-60 average, 4.48% males and 5.38% female students scored between 60-70 in their performance and 3.13% males and 4.03 female students scored between 70-80 while only 1.35% males and 2.69% of the female students scored 80 and above .

Research Question 5: To what extent does PTSD influence the academic performance of secondary school students in Benue States when segregated by age?

Table 5: Percentage and frequency scores of secondary schools students with PTSD related symptoms in Benue State

S/No.	Age of Students	Frequency	Percentage
28	10 - 12 years	41	19.16
29	12 - 14 Years	23	10.75
30	14 - 16 Years	76	35.51
31	16 - 18 Years	62	28.97
32	18 and above	12	5.61

Table 5 indicated that 41 students between the ages of 10 – 12 years scored 19.16% and 12 – 14 years scored 10.75%. The total of 76 students who were between 14 – 16 years had 35.51% score while 62 students from 16 – 18 years had 28.975 score and those of 18 years above could only score 5.61%.

Discussion of findings

The findings of the study indicated that PTSD symptoms were prevalent among secondary school students within Benue State especially the Local Government Areas affected by the communal/boundary disputes and herdsmen/farmers clashes. The finding indicates that a good percent of students display emotional numbness, mood changes and extreme fear while greater percent display aggression in their daily activities and relationship with

fellow students and staff, as well as crime tendencies. This discovery was supported by Yule (2001), when he stated that people who were exposed to traumatic events subsequently experience emotional and psychological change known as post traumatic growth (PTG) or PTSD. The exposures of the students to these traumatic experiences as a result of the militia, communal/boundary and herders/farmers clashes are likely to affect their physical and emotional stability and future growth and development in the society.

The study equally found out that the percentage of the observable symptoms of PTSD manifested by the students affects their academic performances. Most of the discovered observable symptoms include depression, flash backs, avoidance of people, nightmares, apprehension and deep thought. Others were absent mindedness as well as reactions to stimuli. The result of their performance owing to the PTSD symptoms indicated that greater percentage of the students scored between 35 – 50% as against the number that scored between 60 – 80% and above. This could be traced to the psychological and emotional stability of the students. This finding has been given credence by Poirer (2012), in his work on ‘the Effects of Armed Conflict on Schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa.’ He opined that child and adult who have been exposed to traumatic events for a long time are in danger of developing severe PTSD symptoms that would hamper their educational development and general human well-being.

The study also found out that there was difference in the performance of the students according to their sexes. The greater percentage of female students scored higher than their male counterparts in their school signifying that the females were psychologically and emotionally stronger and stable than the male. This study established that though PTSD affected most of the students in their academic performance, however the males took the larger share of the effects, which might be a result of emotional and psychological tolerance level.

With respect to the influence of PTSD on the students’ performance due to age, it was found that age was a factor. According to Bakar and Kabiru (2018), the appreciation of traumatic events in an individual’s life, to a great extent, is dependent on the assimilation and comprehension level of understanding of such a person mainly as a result of age. To them, it might seem that mature individuals would have the ability to control their responses to traumatic events than the much younger ones. This might not always be the same as postulated by Blanchard-Fields, Stein and Watson (2004), who in their study to obtain complete picture of age difference on how individuals manage their emotions in crisis situations, established that age difference is traceable when emotion- regulation strategies in interpersonal stimulus that are academically related is applied. In this case, this strategy was not applied. However, the result indicates that the students within the ages of 14 – 18 which is 64.48% of the sample population when 35.51% and 28.97% are added together, scored better than the younger ones showing that they manage themselves better due to their age despite their exposure to the traumatic events.

Conclusion

The experience and exposure of children/adolescent/students to traumatic ugly experience pertaining to the loss of loved ones, displacement from houses, unplanned stay in IDP camps, starvation, kidnapping, killing, burning of their houses while asleep, maiming of human beings and armed conflict have detrimental consequences to the students' mental health, emotional and psychological stability. These could manifest in depression, emotional numbness, apprehension, absentmindedness, fear, nightmare and aggression amongst others after the horrifying event. The existence of this among students in schools as discovered in Benue State by this study is called PTSD which if not identified early and managed could ruin the future of the individual students and affect the society at large. It was also concluded in this study that students manifesting the mentioned symptoms would find it difficult to perform at their optimal educational level regardless of age and gender.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the government, philanthropic and non-governmental organisations should strive to identify these students so as to encourage early management to enable them achieve their maximum potentials. Also all stakeholders are enjoined to endeavour to work towards peaceful coexistence of all.

References

- Achikasim, N. C. (2019). Teaching and Learning in a Conflict Environment: Implication for Educational Attainment and Development in the North Eastern State of Nigeria. *Journal of Teaching and Learning in Africa*, 4(1), 114-126.
- Ameh, G. G. (2016). Agatu Killings: Benue Lawmakers blast Buhari, Dambazzau. *Punch Newspaper*, 18 March.
- Bakar, Z. A. & Kabiru, D. K. (2018). The Effects of War to the Nigerian Educational Activities. *Journal of Education and Learning*, November 1. Pp.
- Blanchard-Fields, F. & Stein, R. & Watson, T. L. (2004). Age Differences in Emotion-Regulation Strategies in Handling Everyday Problems. *J. Gerontol. B. PsycholSciSocSci.*, 59(6), 261-269. doi:10.1093/geronb/59.6.P261
- Birmes, P., Hatton, L., Brunet, A. & Schmitt, L. (2003). Early historical literature for posttraumatic symptom- atology. *Stress and Health*, 19,17–26.
- Denga, D. I. (1998). *Educational Malpractice and Cultism in Nigeria: Analysis and Confronting Techniques* (1st ed.). Calabar: Rapid Educational Pub Ltd.
- Gaskia, J. (2019). Governing and Securing Rural and other Contested Spaces in Nigeria; Challenges Options for Stakeholders. FES/CISLAC Policy Brief. Retrieved from www.cislacnigeria.net, www.fes-nigeria.org.
- Joda, F. & Abdurashed, O. (2015). Effects of Insurgency on Girls Education in the North-eastern Nigeria. *European Journal of Education and Development Psychology*, 3(1), 44-50.
- Kaysen, D., Resick, P. & Wise, D. (2003). Living in danger, the impact of chronic traumatization and the traumatic context on post –traumatic stress disorder. *Journal of Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 4(3), 247-264.

- Kaysen, D., Rosen, G., Bowman, M. & Resick, P. (2009). Duration of Exposure and the Dose – Response Model of PTSD. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 25(1), 63 - 74.
- Mohlen, H., Parzer, P., Resch, F. & Brunner, R. (2005). Psychosocial support for war-traumatized child and adolescent refugees: Evaluation of a short-term treatment program. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 39(1-2), 81-87.
- Oche, O. (2011). Democratization and the Management of African Security. *Nigeria Journal of International Affairs*, 13(1), 21-31.
- Ogbebo, W. (2014). Insecurity Threatens Girl-child Education in Nigeria – *UNICEF. Leadership Newspaper*, June 15.
- Olugbode, M. (2015). Children Now Live in Fear in Northeastern Nigeria. *ThisDayLive*, September 02,
- Owonikoko, O. (2021). Insecurity is Crippling Nigeria’s Education System- Here’s what we Do. *The Cable News*, May 17.
- Poirer, T. (2012). The Effects of Armed Conflict on Schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 32, 341–351.
- Reifman, A. McIntosh, D. & Eллиworth, P. C. (2000). Depression and Affects Among Law Students During Law School: A Longitudinal Study. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 2(1).
- Rivera, D. P. & Smith, D. D. (1997). *Teaching Students with Learning Behaviour Problems* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Stein, B., Comer, D., Gardner, W. & Kelleher, K. (1999). Prospective study of displaced children’s symptoms in wartime Bosnia. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 34(9), 464–469. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s001270050221>
- Wokocha, A. M. (2014). Nigerian Schools: Issues and Strategies. Paper presented at African Forum of teaching and Regulatory Authorities Ghana. Retrieved from www.africateachingauthorities.org.
- Yule, W. (2001). Posttraumatic stress disorder in the general population and in children. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 62(17), 23-28.