

Vol 4 (1) pp. 1-8 May, 2018

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ISSN: 2985-8763

Full Length Research Paper

An Analysis of the Nomadic Fulani Herdsmen's Violent Attacks in Southeastern Nigeria, and Their Effects on Adolescents

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Accepted 21st May, 2018

Abstract

The aim of the study was to analyze the negative effects of the violent attacks by the nomadic Fulani herdsmen in Southeastern Nigeria, with a focus on adolescents living in the region. Data were collected with a questionnaire administered to secondary schools. Two-hundred and fifty adolescents (170 girls, 80 boys; 15–17 years of age) completed a questionnaire pertaining of both single items and seven scales measuring PTSD, physical punishment, domestic violence, parental negativity, anti-social behavior, poverty and war experiences. Girls scored significantly higher than boys on symptoms of PTSD. Of the 250 adolescents, 20.8% had lost someone close to them during the war, and 8.4% had themselves been injured. Nine percent had themselves injured someone during the war, and 5.2% had actually killed someone during the war. Three (1.8%) had been raped by an armed group, and two (1.2%) had been taken as a sex slave. The results indicate that the Fulani herdsmen attacks had a strongly negative impact on the adolescents which are likely to affect them throughout the rest of their lives.

Keywords: Fulani herdsmen, adolescents, war, rape, PTSD, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the study was to analyze how adolescents in the Southeastern Nigeria region were affected by the violent attacks by the nomadic Fulani herdsmen. This is an area which so far has received little attention, and the study aims at bringing knowledge about this problem. The study is exploratory, and it is conducted with a quantitative approach.

Background

Struggle over access to and control of natural resources have been a root cause of tension and conflict in different societies and developing nations like Nigeria. The same history has mentioned several examples of how states and nations were destabilized by ecological collapse causing famine, migration and conflict (Renner *et al.*, 1991). The crisis between nomadic Fulani herdsmen and farming communities in Nigeria is centered on land use for agricultural production. In Nigerian economy, agriculture plays a paramount role in the provision of food and income. Over 60% of the country's populations are employed in agriculture, while about 20% are into commercial agricultural production (Patricia, 2001).

Over the years, Nigeria has been known as the highest breeder of cattle as a source of meat, the most available and cheap source of animal protein in Africa. Over 90% of the national livestock population is owned by the nomadic Fulani, accounting for 3.2% of the Nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) through the exportation of cattle products such as hide and skin, milk, cheese, minced meat, etc. (Eniola *et al.*, 2016; Mur, 2001; Bello, 2013). The increase in the animal production has resulted in conflicts in various farming communities of Nigeria. Haro and Dayo (2005) observed that the major cause of the conflict is culpable of the mobile movement of the nomadic Fulani herdsmen in search of greener pastures. During the agricultural cultivation season, the herders wonder into cultivated farms while their herds eat or trample on the crop. The crisis between the nomadic Fulani herders and farming communities is a result of the destruction of crops, unsustainable and over-grazing of vegetable resources, destruction of major sources of domestic water, the hardening of soil, and, in turn, theft of cattle by community youth (Marietu and Olarewaju, 2009).

Both national and private approaches to resolve the crisis between Nomadic Fulani herders and farming

communities are majorly overwhelmed by the economic and political implications, with less or no interest on how it affect the adolescent citizens. It affects children beyond emotional and behavioral disorders. According to Ney and Wickett (1994), exposure to violence affects the reasoning pattern of children and their conception of the human world. The aim of the current study is to analyze the negative effects of the violent attacks by the Nomadic Fulani herdsmen, in the Southeastern geo-political region of Nigeria, with a focus on their impact on adolescents living in the region. Data were collected with a questionnaire administered to schools. Two-hundred and fifty adolescents (170 girls, 80 boys; mean age 16.1 years, SD 1.1) participated in filling in the questionnaire pertaining of both single items and scales measuring PTSD, physical punishment, domestic violence, parental negativity, anti-social behavior, poverty and war experiences.

Southeastern Region of Nigeria

Southeastern Nigeria comprises of various states like Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. It is one of the geopolitical zones in modern Nigeria created during the regime of President General Sani Abacha. Igbo-speaking people from the majority of the inhabitants in the region, which has a population density of 500 people per square kilometer (Okafor and Fernandes, 1987). The Southeastern region stretches from 4°15' to 7° N and 5°49' to 9°30' E, occupying a space of about 75,500 square km. Rainfall is known to be high along the coast and could reach 4000mm yearly. On the inland, the rainfall density is high with up to three months of dry season. The temperature throughout the year could range from 25°C to 27°C. The primary occupation of low-income households is agriculture. They cultivate both for subsistence and commercial purposes. Nevertheless, the literacy rate of the region is 96.5%, making it the highest literate geopolitical zone in the country. Nevertheless, the urban cities of the region have relatively good roads unlike the rural areas, where transportation is poor.

Adolescents Exposure to Violence

Since the formulation of the Convention on the Right of the Child, which was enforced into law in 1990 in accordance with article 49 of the United Nation, emphasis has been put on the importance to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence, including sexual and other forms of exploitation, abduction, armed conflict, and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (UNICEF, 1989; Levesque, 1994). Even with the effort by different countries to ensure that all child victims of

violence receive the support and assistance they need, children's exposure to violence is still an important issue. Throughout the world, armed conflicts have a profound impact the physical and mental well-being of children (Shenoda *et al.*, 2015).

In Nigeria, children continue to experience different forms of violence perpetrated against them. Studies on child victims of violence in Nigeria have been sparse, and focused to particular forms of violence (Salami, 2010). Studies are confined within areas such as students' cultism (Oni, 2009), school bullying (Jegede, 2008), child labour, sexual abuse (Oladeji, 2003), and adolescent pregnancy (Ugoji, 2009). Only recently have certain forms of child victimization like maltreatment, child sexual abuse and parental negativity against children begun to gain societal attention. Until now, they were regarded as private matters, taken care within the immediate family (Salami, 2010). There is a knowledge gap concerning adolescent's exposure to armed conflict in Nigeria. Adolescents living in Nigeria encounter different kinds of violent events daily. In high profile events, such as the Boko Haram insurgence, the Niger Delta conflict, the Pro-Biafra protest, the Nomadic Fulani Herdsmen violent attacks, exposed adolescents witness random gun shootings, littered dead bodies, houses and churches set ablaze, and the threatening of relatives and family members. Such experiences cause emotional distress that goes beyond physical recognition. Richters and Martinz (1993) reported that children exposed to community violence had high rates of overall distress. The psychological distress in adolescents who have been exposed to violence is shown in symptoms of posttraumatic stress, anxiety, dissociation, depression, and low self-esteem (Cerezo, 1996; Duncan *et al.*, 1996; Famularo *et al.*, 1994; Hurt *et al.*, 2001; Irwin, 1996).

METHOD

Sample

The sample was drawn from four secondary schools in the communities of Atakwu, Akegbe, Ugwu, Nkwo, Nike, and Nimbo in Enugu State, which all had been subjected to attacks by the Fulani herdsmen. The sample consisted of 250 adolescents, 170 girls (mean age = 16.1 years, SD = 1.1) and 80 boys (mean age = 16.2 years, SD = 1.1). The age difference between girls and boys was not significant. All except one reported Christianity as their religion. Regarding language, 248 reported Igbo as their first language, and two reported Yoruba.

Regarding their place of living, 225 (90%) reported that they "often" or "very often" lived with their family, 35 (15%) with relatives, 16 (6.4%) in the street, four (1.6%)

in an orphanage, and eight (3.2%) in a refugee camp. It should be noted that some of the respondents reported living "often" or "very often" in more than one place.

Instrument

The data were collected by the use of a paper-and-pencil questionnaire, consisting of 85 questions. The questions were grouped into different parts: (1) background questions, (2) questions about specific war experiences, and (3) six scales measuring (a) symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome, (b) experiences of physical punishment, (c) domestic violence, (d) parental negativity, (e) antisocial behavior, and (f) witnessed war experiences against family members. The items and the reliability scores of the scales, measured with Cronbach's α , are presented in Table 1.

Procedure

The data were collected from secondary schools in the Southeastern part of Nigeria that had been under attack from nomadic Fulani herdsmen. Prior to the collection of the data, due processes were observed. Permission was obtained from the mayor and from the police department. Several meetings were organized between the researcher and the school administration, and informed parental consent was also provided.

On the day of data collection, two assistants who themselves were researchers from a University in Enugu State, Nigeria, aided in the data collection process. Teachers responsible for the different classes assigned by the school principals were assisting in the process of distributing questionnaires, papers and pencils. Participation was optional, and accepting participants were instructed to keep their responses anonymous. The researcher read the questions aloud in order to ensure that the students would understand, and the respondents were given opportunity to clarify questions both before and during the exercise.

Ethical Considerations

Parental consent was given in the case of the under-aged children that participated in the filling of study questionnaires. Verbal consent was also given by each child. The children received a carefully worded explanation concerning anonymity in participation. The study adhered to the principles concerning human research ethics of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013), as well as guidelines for the responsible conduct of research of The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, (2012).

Table 1. Single Items and Cronbach's Alpha of the Seven Scales Measuring Scales Included in the Questionnaire, with Individual Items and Reliability Scores (Cronbach's α) (N = 250)

PTSD, 20 items $\alpha = .93$	a)repeated, disturbing and unwanted memories, b) repeated, disturbing dreams about the event, c) sudden feeling or acting as if the event is ongoing, d) feeling upset when reminded of the conflict event, d) having a strong physical reaction when reminded of the event, f) avoiding memories, thought or feelings about the event, g) avoiding external reminders of the event, h) trouble remembering the event, i) having strong negative belief about oneself, other or world, j) blaming oneself or someone else for the event, k) having strong negative feeling like fear, horror, anger, shame, l) loss of interest in activities that one used to do, l) feeling distanced or cut off from other people, m) trouble experiencing positive feelings or loving feelings, n) irritable behavior, angry outburst or aggression, o) taking too many risks or doing things that harms, p) being super-alert or watchful or on guard, q) feeling jumpy or easily startled, r) having difficulty concentrating, s) trouble falling asleep
Parental negativity, 6 items ($\alpha = .87$)	a)name calling or bullying, b) insults, c) making and breaking promises, d) constant criticism, e) intimidation, f) harassment
Anti-social Behavior, 7 items ($\alpha = .70$)	a)stolen petty things or items, b) used catapult on a friend, neighbor or anyone, c) cheated a neighbor of their belongings, d) smoked a cigarette, e) been concentrated at school, f) fighting in school, g) absenteeism from school
War Experience, 5 items ($\alpha = .76$)	a)been involved in fighting in war, b) been used as spy in the last war, c) injured someone else in the war, e) lost a close one through death in the war
Poverty, 4 items ($\alpha = .77$)	a)lack of clothes or shoes, b) food rationing, c) unavailable or inadequate medication, d) unavailable or inadequate food or drink
Domestic Violence, 6 items ($\alpha = .86$)	have you witnessed your parents;.... a) fighting physically, b) making or breaking promises, c) throwing things at each other, d) damaging belongings, e) twist each other's arm
Physical Punishment 6 items ($\alpha = .88$)	a)pulled your ears, b) pulled your hair, c) slapped you, d) hit you with an object, e) pinched you, f) thrown things at you, g) knocking on the head, h) knelling down and stay there

RESULTS

Specific War Experiences

The respondents were asked a number of dichotomous questions (yes/no) about whether they had had some specific war experiences themselves during the Nomadic Fulani Herdsmen's attacks. The results are summarized in Table 2. It should be noted that as many as thirteen (5.2%) admitted having killed someone. Out of the 250 adolescent participants, 52 (20.8%) confirmed having lost

a close relative during the attacks. Also, 21 adolescent participants (8.4%) declared being injured and losing some parts of the body. It is in consonance with previous studies showing that during war, exposed children may lose a limb (Barbara, 2006).

Family's War Experiences

Participants were also asked to describe their family's war experiences and how often they occurred. Fourteen (5.6%) reported being threatened, or had experienced

Table 2. Individual War Experiences during the Nomadic Fulani Herdsmen's Violent Attacks

Have you...	Yes	No
Been involved in fighting in a war	8 (3.2%)	230 (92.0%)
Been used as a spy during war	8 (3.2%)	232 (92.8%)
Been injured in a war accident	21 (8.4%)	220 (74.8%)
Injured someone else in war	23 (9.2%)	220 (88.0%)
Lost someone close during the war	52 (20.8%)	187 (74.8%)
Been forced to separate from parents or siblings during war	12 (4.8%)	229 (91.6%)
Killed someone	13 (5.2%)	227 (90.8%)

Table 3. Responses to How Much the Respondents had Witnessed Atrocities towards Their Family Members

	Often	Very often
Threatened with a weapon	10(4.0%)	14(5.6%)
Injured	13(5.2%)	11(4.4%)
Sexually assaulted	11(4.4%)	7(2.8%)
Tortured	8(3.2%)	5(2.0%)
Killed	4(1.6%)	18(7.2%)

Table 4. Experiences of Sexual Violence during the War

	Yes	No
Stripped off clothes forcefully	7(4.1%)	157(92.4%)
Sexually abused during war	3(1.8%)	162(95.3%)
Raped by armed group	3(1.8%)	158(92.9%)
Taken as sex slave	2(1.2%)	162(95.3%)

Table 5. Frequency of People Who Had Their House and Property Destroyed

	Yes	No
Was your household set ablaze	14(8.2%)	154(90.6%)
Was the hospital in your town set ablaze	20(11.8%)	148(87.1%)
Did you lose family farm products	74(43.5%)	95(55.9%)
Family vehicle was burnt	21(12.4%)	146(85.9%)
Did you lose your personal belongings	39(22.9%)	127(74.7%)
Was your accommodation open to rain and sunlight	32(18.8%)	131(77.1%)

family members being threatened with a weapon very often (cf. Table 3). Victimization to sexual violence was another war experience found to occur within the communities. Eleven (4.4%) participants confirmed that family members had been sexually assaulted often and seven (2.8%) declared experiencing sexual assault very often.

Sexual Violence

Some items of the questionnaire concerned how much the participants themselves were sexually victimized during the nomadic Fulani herdsmen's attacks, and the

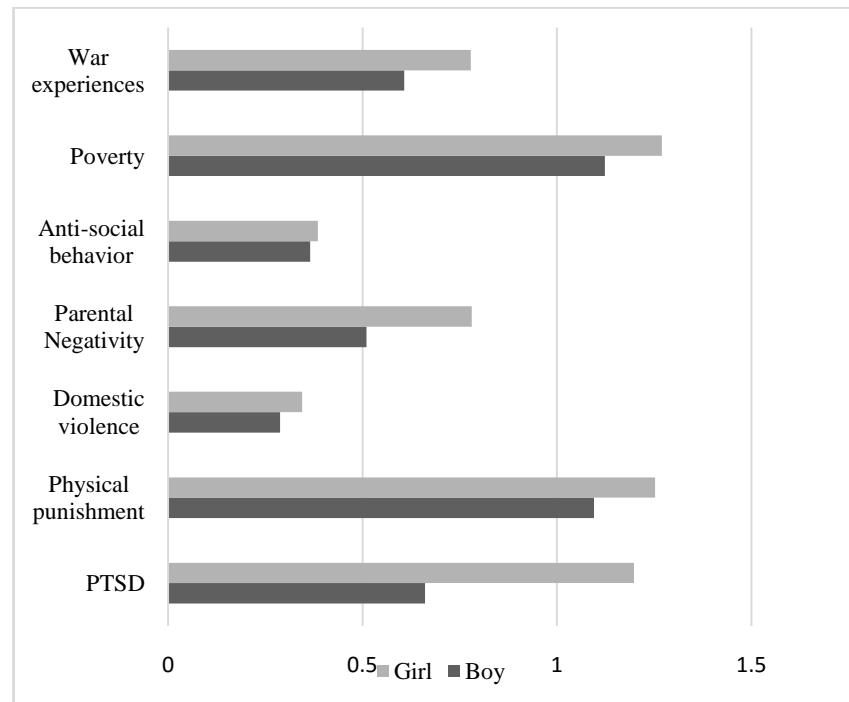
results are presented in Table 4. The results show that seven (4.1%) adolescent participants were stripped of their clothes forcefully, and three (1.8%) admitted being raped by an armed group. Two had been taken as sex slaves.

Economic Effects

The economic impact of the nomadic Fulani herdsmen's attacks was substantial, as presented in Table 5. When war erupts, families are displaced, resources destroyed, and business activities are interrupted. It was found that houses and property were destroyed during the attack

Table 6. The Results from a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) with Gender as Independent Variable and the Seven Scales of the Study as Dependent Variables (N=250) cf. Fig. 1

	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> ≤	η_p^2
Effect of gender:Multivariate analysis	3.52	7,242	.001	.092
Univariate analyses				
PTSD	22.856	1,248	.001	.084
Physical punishment	1.428	1,248	ns	.006
Domestic violence	0.363	1,248	ns	.001
Parental negativity	2.531	1,248	ns	.010
Anti-social behavior	0.106	1,248	ns	.000
Poverty	0.001	1,248	ns	.000
War experiences	2.422	1,248	ns	.010

**Figure 1.** Mean values for females and males on the seven scales (N=250), cf. Table 6.

(Table 5). Seventy-four (43.5%) admitted losing their family farm products to fire that broke up during the attack. Fourteen (8.2%) confirmed witnessing their household being set ablaze by the nomadic Fulani herdsman. Twenty (11.8%) participants reported that their community healthcare center was set ablaze. The study shows that many children were displaced, and thirty-two (18.8%) participants reported having had their accommodation open to rain and sunlight.

Gender Differences in the Victimization of Violent Attacks by Nomadic Fulani Herdsmen

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was carried out with gender as independent variable and seven types of experiences (the scales of the study) as dependent variables. The results are presented in Table 6 and Fig 1. The multivariate analysis revealed a significant difference between boys and girls. However,

the univariate analyses showed that of the individual variables, there was only one variable that showed a significant difference between the genders, i.e. PTSD, but this difference was quite prominent. No gender differences were found for physical punishment, domestic violence, parental negativity, anti-social behavior, poverty, and war experiences (Table 6).

Relationships between the Seven Dependent Variables

Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to find the associations between PTSD, physical punishment, domestic violence, parental negativity, anti-social behavior, poverty and war experience by the war-exposed adolescents. Results showed that there were significant associations between all variables, except for poverty. Table 7 presents correlations between the variables separately for boys and for girls.

DISCUSSION

This study provides information about how adolescents were affected by the nomadic Fulani herdsmen's attacks in Southeast Nigeria. It was found that girls reported significantly more symptoms of PTSD than boys. This finding is in line with other studies which have found that females are two times more likely to suffer PTSD than males after exposure to a traumatic event (Freedy *et al.*, 2010).

The participating adolescents reported war experiences such as being involved in fighting during the war, used as a spy, injured someone and loosing close relatives through death in the war. Some of them also reported being stripped of their clothing forcefully (4.1%), sexually abused (1.8%), raped (1.8%) and taken as slaves (1.2%). It should be noted that 13 respondents (5.2%) admitted having killed someone. With the exception of PTSD, no gender differences were found in the MANOVA analysis of the seven scales. However, out of the one hundred and seventy female adolescents, 4.1% had experiences of being sexually abused, and (1.8%) reported having been a sex slave.

Methodological Issues and Limitations of the Study

The study has certain limitations. First, this was a cross-sectional study and consequently, causal relationships concerning the impact of the attacks on the adolescents cannot be ascertained. This would have required a longitudinal design. Second, the study has been limited to the reliance on the adolescents' reports only. The

adolescents might not have been able to describe their individual and family experiences exactly. Information from other family members such as parents, foster-parents, or guardians and teachers, together with observational assessments, could have been valuable additions to the study.

Implications of the Study

Since no previous studies of this kind concerning adolescents' experiences of the nomadic Fulani herdsmen's attacks in the Southeast part of Nigeria could be found, the current study may hopefully serve as an eye-opener to the communities and the government of Nigeria. It demonstrates that exposure to these traumatic events contributes to PTSD among adolescents living in Southeast Nigeria. The types and frequencies of their traumatic experiences have been investigated. These findings highlight the need for the government to address the cause of violent attacks between herdsmen and the farming communities in Nigeria. In addition, the study indicates the need for immediate proper treatment for these adolescents, to reduce the effect of their war trauma. Societal institutions should organize activities to help families and adolescents to improve their mental health and overcome their trauma through various therapeutic and educational programs.

Suggestions for Future Research

The current study has provided insights into the effects of the nomadic Fulani herdsmen's attacks on the adolescents living in Southeast Nigeria. Future research could assess their relevance to other contexts. One could also investigate the prevalence of PTSD among adolescents who have had specific traumatic experiences, such as being a sex slave, or having killed someone.

Future research could examine the prevalence of PTSD among adolescents in other parts of Nigeria. From a public health point of view, the present findings have implications for screening for disorders other than PTSD. There is also a need to detect youth at risk who have been exposed to the attacks, those with pre-war mental disorders, and target them for interventions.

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