PERCIEVED IMPACT OF VIOLENT CONFLICT ON EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENT OF CHILDREN IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of violent conflict on the emotional adjustment of children in Nigeria. Two groups of participants were involved. The first group was sixteen children from Co-educational Secondary School in Nsukka, Enugu State (8 boys and 8 girls). Twelve of these were (12-14) years, with a mean age of 13 years while the other four were two boys and two girls, age (14-16) years, with a mean age of 15 years. This group provided the preliminary information on their emotional feelings of violent conflict. The second group was 200 secondary school students from Co-educational(Urban)Secondary School in Enugu, randomly sampled on equal gender sample from junior secondary three (JSS 3, age 13-15) years and senior secondary three (SSS 3, age 16-18) years with mean age of 14 years and 17 years respectively. The results showed that there was significant relationship between violent conflict and emotional adjustment of children $r=.88$ $P<.001$.
Key words: **violent conflict. emotional adjustment. childhood**

Introduction

Observation of what is happening in Nigeria today in terms of insecurity of life hovering all over the place creates a lot of emotional turbulence in people. The rampant cases of ethnic group clashes, religious upheaval, political bickering, human trafficking, kidnapping, armed robbery, raping, killing and the most recent *Boko Haram* sect incessant bombing activities show that the security system in the country is highly porous. These social evils rearing their heads high in the country can be so debilitating on the emotional state of the individuals especially children who are emotionally easily disturbed. Nwoke (2010) observed that all the antisocial behaviours, dehumanization and the like are impinging heavily on the emotional domain and the subsequent adjustment of youngsters who by the virtue of their developmental stage are facing a lot of emotional storm and stress.

It has been variously observed that the body and face play important roles in understanding children's emotions which can be pleasant or unpleasant. For example children panic and are restless when they are subjected to stressful situations (Harris, 1989, Chauhan, 1991, Nwoke, 2007a). Harris (1989) explained emotion as a feeling that involves a mixture of psychological arousal, for example a fast heartbeat and an overt behaviour such as a smile or a grimace of face. Buss and Plomin (1984) posited that children's or infants' temperament falls into three basic categories, namely: active, easy and difficult temperament, and emotionality is the tendency to display any type of temperament. It reflects the arousal of a person's sympathetic nervous system which is further expressed in actions or behaviours.

Nweze (1996) indicated that life experiences are known to form the individual's social and emotional adaptation which includes the personality development and adjustment of children who are more prone to emotional storm and stress. Santrock (2006, 2007) also observed that differences

in children's social and emotional life experiences are indeed a function of the interaction between the individuals and their social environments. These imply that whatever the nature the environment always impacts on the emotional adjustment of the child. If it is peaceful, it gives peace and healthy interpersonal relationship with neighbours. A feeling of comfort and leads to the sense of security. If the environment is hostile, with violent conflict, it portends insecurity, which creates emotional turbulence in the individuals and especially children. In the violent conflict ridden zones, people especially children feel insecure, they are emotionally distressed, full of anxiety and are tensed-up with fears of the unknown events.

Nigeria is a country with multi-ethnic groups, multi-religious and diversified cultural backgrounds. It is a nation imbued with the potentials for greatness. The country is highly endowed with both human and material resources. Nigeria is peopled by highly prolific and resourceful individuals who have shown some knack for speedy actualization of the goals of nationhood. Nigeria has the prospect of maintaining an enviable socio-political legacy that can stand the test of time. But unfortunately, the one problem that has continued to rear its ugly head and persistently threatening to tear the vision of this great nation into shreds is the gory spates, of intra-ethnic-socio-religious violent conflict. Socio-religious violent conflict and politically motivated killings are presently plaguing the country (Iwu, 2011/2012). Since the enthronement of the current democratic process in 1999, the nation has witnessed catalogues of senseless intra-ethnic-religious killings and brutal assassinations of a good number of high profile Nigerians over trivial political differences. Some of those who were killed were innocent victims and those who wanted to identify their efforts to extricate vintages of social injustice in the country.

Review of related literature

Adejumobi (2005) revealed that apart from the fact that the nation underwent a civil war between 1967 and 1970; in the last two decades, there has been the resurgence of identity based violent conflicts mostly of ethno-religious dimensions. These conflicts have seen communities, ethnic groups, clans and tribes take up arms against each other. A surprising thing about these conflicts is that they span across almost the entire breath of the country embracing the different geo-political zones. Often it is a gory scene that these conflicts assume both rural and urban dimensions; thereby creating tensions and mental agony in many individuals. Of course children are not drafted out of these scenes. For instance in the southern part of the country, there is the Ife-Modakeke, Ijaw-Ilaje, Umuneri-Aguleri violent conflicts. In the Northern part of the country there is Tiv-Jukun, Zangon-Kataf, Chamba-Kute violent conflicts amongst others. In addition to these are the religious based crises spurred by the introduction of sharia, a panel code in some states of Northern Nigeria. This in effect ignited debilitating crisis in places like Zamfara, Kaduna, Kano, Bauchi and Jos. In such violent conflicts, many families got displaced and most of the children see their parents or siblings killed in such violent conflicts. What a gory scene?

Adejumobi (2005) also observed that in some states in the north, Muslims now occupy one area and the Christians occupy another. Momo (2001) succinctly described the situation in Northern Nigeria as the creation of Mecca for the Muslims in Kaduna North, and Jerusalem for Christians in Kaduna South; and in Kano it is the creation of American city for the Christians and Afghanistan city for the Muslims. It is observed that these crises became more acute as boundaries between ethnic groups and religious identities tend to overlap, children are not isolated from the scenes, they are parts and parcel of the crises. Children from these areas are subjected to the emotional agony and are psychologically traumatized as they witness the gory situations and

internalize such bitter events and woes. Such children wallow in the sea of emotional turbulence, confusion, abject misery, mistrust, hostility and insecurity. Children from such zones have learned aggression and are prone to aggressive- crime behaviours of fighting, killing, destroying, burning, setting places and buildings ablaze. (Nwosu,2000, Santrock,2007, Nwoke, 2010).

Abudul (2002) indicated that the scale of human tragedy that often accompanied violent conflict in Nigeria is monumental. It was observed that in recent times as many as thousands of people have lost their lives in communal, ethnic and religious conflicts. With these followed unprecedented loss of property, social displacement and violation of human rights. Abudul (2002) cited an example with religious riot in Kaduna State in February, 2000, where 1,400 people were reported killed, over 1,944 buildings comprising hotels, business centres, and residences were destroyed and more than 70,000 people were displaced with their hapless children. In the Tiv-Jukun communal conflict of November, 2001, it was estimated that more than 2,000 people were killed and property worth 50 million naira destroyed and the rights of over 50,000 people were violated as they fled from their various home stead. It is observed that in the major cities of Nigeria like Kano and Lagos which are mostly cosmopolitan, new dimensions of ethnic-based urban violent conflicts abound. There are new types of ethnic militia to protect their ethnic group and localities and drive out 'non-indigene Nigerians'. The logic of inclusion and exclusion is based on ethnic identity. It therefore implies that the lives and rights of the 'non-indigenes Nigerians' (Nigerians who took refuge to another part of the country) are at stake.

In recent times violent conflicts in the Northern States like Bauchi, Jos, Maiduguri, Kano and Kaduna have claimed numerous lives of adults, youths and children; and uncountable children are left roaming about the streets, without hope, without home, and without security. Such children may not understand any other language than that of war, rancour, hostility, strife

and violent conflict.   One wonders what the future of Nigeria would be with this sort of hostile cohabitations and violent conflicts. The effects of the acts are disastrous and debilitating on humanity, especially on youngsters who are more emotionally stricken. Nwoke (2010) posited that whatever types of behaviour the individual child is greeted with is what he /she makes his/ her pattern of life and behaviour.

Nwoke (2010) succinctly explained that the way things are happening in Nigeria looks queer and tends to put the country in dilemma. There is disorder, bickering and rancor. The dichotomy prevalent in the country is a reflection of adults' life and the characteristic ways of handling social issues which the young generation is copying. If Nigerian adults use derogatory words on others and initiate violent conflicts in the country, then the young ones will declare hot war.   This is because whatever language character presented to the youngster, such becomes his/her point of reference

   Observation shows that since Nigeria gained her independence, there has not been genuine peace. The nation has been moving from one form of violence to another, inter-ethnic conflict, political bickering and instability, religious upheavals, oil and gas wealth tussle in the Niger Delta region. The country had lived in rancour over its identity despite of the years of managing to live together; this is portrayed in the incessant ferocity of crisis that claimed thousand of lives. These various violent conflicts have led to bloodshed, destruction of property, insecurity and instability in the country. Some Nigerians have left the country because of routine type of violent conflict in the country and the security of life has become so porous (Erinsho, 2004).

        Nwoke (2009) noted that in the state of anarchy or violent conflicts many people are often declared missing. Some of the missing people are captured by the stronger force, and are used for rituals. Some others are sold to human hawkers who later hawked them to any part of the world

which is involved in human trafficking. Children from these violent conflict-ridden zones are not isolated from the conflict scenes and most often the children are the worst hit group. It is important to note that children in the violent conflict ridden zones may have been affected cognitively, emotionally, psychologically, socially, morally as well as in their interpersonal relationships with neighbours and society at large. If the children become affected, it may take time for them to understand any other language, or social behavioural pattern than that of violent conflict, rancour and strife in their life.

   There are so many health hazards associated with violent conflict. For instance, many people especially children die of malnutrition and unquantifiable diseases, resulting from psychological trauma, fear and anxiety. IRIN's (2001) report stated that the health condition of most of the children of the internally displaced people in Gombe State was pathetic and they got malnourished due to irregular and poor feeding. The children are developing fever and diarrhea at the camp.(IRIN,24 July,2001).   Inweregbu (2007) observed that most of the children develop fever and diarrhea and die, because in most violent conflict situations health facilities are disrupted. With the problem of ill-health such children remain in endemic agony and misery. "For instance, Red Cross report, in Medicare , at Uikpam Camp (2001).

Nigeria children in armed conflict situations face the double tragedy of denied education and vulnerability to life threatening diseases. Women and children in particular are susceptible to worries at the difficult conditions which they had to endure, A nurse from the main hospital in Makurdi, the Benue State Capital drafted to provide emergency medicare for victims in Uikpam Camp. She laments: …. ''those arriving were suffering everything from exhaustion and dehydration to machete cuts. The situation is desperate. People are just fleeing. We met some of

them with an ambulance but there were just too many. Some women had just given birth and fled, abandoning their babies. One woman had died in childbirth on the road''

Ibeanu (1999) found that tribal conflicts and internal population displacement make people feel exiled and strange wherever they find themselves. Neil (2005) and Inweregbu (2007) observed that during armed conflicts, children get trapped into various circumstances. Often times they live in areas where they may be required or forced to participate in low-intensity warfare for many years, their families may be displaced and may lose their possessions and lands, they may be separated from caregivers or remain with them, wallowing in the hollow hands of abject poverty. Such children may be abducted by armed groups; they may be sexually exploited and tortured. Such children may witness death, killing and injuries of their parents, other family members, friends and neighbours. One could imagine the emotional distress of children with such awful and traumatic experiences.

Some of the major security problems identified in Nigeria and elsewhere to include: political and electioneering conflicts, socio-economic agitations, ethno-religious crisis, ethnic militias, boundary disputes, cultism, criminality and organized crimes. These problems, individually or collectively constitute threats to the peace, security and development of the country. Be this as it may, the prevalence of these security problems can have debilitating impact on the emotional adjustment of children.   Usually there is an aftermath effect or post traumatic stress disorder of violent conflict on children. Aftermath effect or post traumatic stress disorder is a configuration of symptoms experienced after a violent traumatic even t(Iwu, 2011/2012). Cunningham and Cunningham (1997) classified this as anxiety disorder, which may be acute or chronic in nature and it can be for short or long term duration.

Hicks, Lalonde, and Pepler (1993) reported that individuals (children or adolescents) suffering from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may exhibit symptoms of confused and disordered memory about issues or events. They may engage in repetitive play themes that depict trauma, or personality change. Such individuals may initiate violent behaviour that may culminate to disaster. These symptoms may vary across age groups. For instance, preschoolers generally manifest very high anxiety, social withdrawal and regressive behaviours. Symptoms in school age children may include flash backs, exaggerated startle responses, poor concentration, sleep disturbance. They may complain physical discomfort and conduct behaviour problems. Symptoms in adolescents may include acting out an aggressive behaviour, delinquency, nightmare trauma and guilt over one's own survival. So children exposed to violent conflict always have a history of agonizing and traumatic stress experiences

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study therefore was to investigate the impact of violent conflict on the emotional adjustment of children in Nigeria. By way of definition children meant in this study embraces people from age 1 to 18 years. Violent conflict, involves all physical or armed combats that can upset the emotional state of the observer, especially that of the youngsters. It was hypothesized in this study that, there would be relationship between violent conflict and children's emotional adjustment. That younger children would report to be more emotionally upset than the older children. Also that female children would be more emotionally disturbed than male children

Method

Participants

Two groups of participants were used in this study. The first group consists of sixteen children, eight males and eight females, age (12 – 16) years with a mean of 14 years. This group was sampled from Co- educational Secondary School in Nsukka, using snowballing technique. This group was necessary because it provided firsthand information on children's opinion concerning how they feel about violent conflicts.   The second group was two hundred male and female students from Co-educational (Urban) Secondary School in Enugu. One hundred students, fifty males and fifty females from junior secondary three (JSS III, age (13 – 15) years with a mean age of 14 years; and one hundred students, fifty males and fifty females from senior secondary three (SSS III, age (16 – 18) years, with a mean age of 17 years. In all two hundred and sixteen (216) students volunteered to participate in the study.

Instrument

Emotional Adjustment Scale (EAS), a 21- item instrument developed and validated by the researcher, was used in the study to assess children's emotional adjustment on violent conflict. The instrument was given to six experts in Social Science and Education to judge for face and content validities. Six (100 %) of them endorsed the instrument as having face and content validities. Items presented statements to which the participants responded on 3 point of True (3),likely (2) and False (1)**.** The scores range between 21 –63 points, with a mean score of 31.5 points. If a participant scored above 31.5 points, he/she sees the impact of violent conflict if it is below 31.5 points; he/she does not see how violent conflict could impact on the emotional adjustment of children.

Since the instrument for this study was new, it was necessary to determine the internal consistency of the items and this was done by item analysis. Twenty (21) items of the original 30 items had internal correlation. Further analyses using the split - half method yielded coefficients reliability ranging from 0.36 to 0.87. The alpha coefficient reliability was .90; which indicates that (EAS) is a reliable instrument for measuring emotional adjustment of children in Nigeria.

Procedure

The researcher visited the Co- educational Secondary School and disclosed the purpose of her research to the School authority, who then allowed her to interact and interview the students. The researcher with the help of research assistants, using snow balling technique selected the sixteen participants who volunteered themselves for the study and provided the first hand information. The researcher structured the information obtained into a research questionnaire. With the help of research assistants the scale was administered to the second group of participants made up of 200 students from Co- educational Secondary School in Enugu . The participants were randomly sampled from the two target classes junior secondary three and senior secondary three, and they freely participated in the in the study.

Design/Statistic

The design employed was Cross-sectional survey design. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used in analyzing the data to test the first hypothesis. In addition, a 2 x 2 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used with two levels of gender (males and females) and two age levels (JSS 3 and SSS 3) to analyze the data and to test the second and third hypotheses.

<center>**Results**</center>

Table 1 Mean and standard deviation of scores of respondents by age

Class	Mean	SD	N

JSS 3(13-15)	58. 8	7.6	100
SS3 (16-18)	50.2	5.54	100

The results in Table 1 showed that the younger children slightly scored higher than the older children on the scale of emotional adjustment of children in Nigeria, with M = 58.8 SD =7.8 for JSS3 and M =50. 2 SD=5.54 for SSS3. The result seems to suggest that younger children can be more emotionally affected in times of violent conflict.

Table 2 Mean and standard deviation scores on responses according to gender

Gender	Mean	SD	N
Males	49.5	4.4	100
Females	57. 7	6 .6	100

The results in table 2 showed that the females slightly scored higher than the male children on the scale of emotional adjustment of children in Nigeria with M= 57.7 SD =6. 6 for females and M = 53.5 SD =5.4 for males. The results buttress the fact that females can be more emotional than males in times of violent conflict.

The Pearson product Moment comparing the responses yielded a significant positive relationship r=88 p< .001 (2 tailed). Thus the expectation of significant positive correlation between violent conflict and emotional adjustment of children was confirmed

Table 3 Summary table of a 2x2 (ANOVA) of mean scores on EAS for group comparison

Source of variation	SS	df	MS	F	Sig
Age	1418.8	1	1418.8	28.5	.0001*
Gender	1310. 2	1	1310 .2	23. 3	.0001*

Age x Gender	1.19	1	0.013	. 918 **
Residual	151. 03	197	74.02	
Total	1486.12	200		

A two way analysis of variance (ANOVA) performed on the data revealed that there were significant impact of both age and gender, $F(1,197) = 28.5$ P $<$ .0001 and $F(1,197) = 23.31$ P $<$ .0001 respectively. Age x gender interaction was not significant, $F(1,197) = 0.013$ P $<$ .918. The results seem to suggest that both males and females, junior and senior perceive the relationship between violent conflict and children's emotional adjustment.

Discussion

There was a significant relationship between violent conflict and emotional adjustment of children. The first hypothesis of this study which predicted that there would be a significant relationship between violent conflict and children's emotional adjustment was confirmed $r = 88$ P $<$ .001. The findings of this present study support Inweregbu (2007) who observed that conflicts of all kinds can easily upset children emotionally. Often simple parental misunderstanding can easily cause children to shed tears and become sad. The second hypothesis stated that younger children would report to be more emotionally upset than the older children. The finding of this study upholds that both the younger and older children perceived that violent conflict can easily upset the emotional state of children; $F(1,197) = 28.5$ P $<$ .0001. The finding of this present study supported Nwoke (2007) who observed that unpleasant experiences like violent conflict can create unpleasant emotions in people especially children. The finding of this present study also buttressed Chauhan (1991) who observed that unpleasant experiences can escalate psychological trauma and depression in people and children are not exempted.

The third hypothesis stated that female children will be emotionally more upset than male children. The findings of this present study showed that both male and female children see violent conflict as a source of emotional stress F (1.197) = 23.31 P < .0001. This finding, supported Nwosu (2000, Nwoke, 2007a, 2007b) which observed that violent conflict like armed robbery, or killing could put human beings of whatever age or gender into emotional turbulence. By implication, the present finding showed that every human being of varying age and gender undergoes the psychological traumatic stress experienced in violent conflict of whatever nature. Children exposed to multiple traumas, like shelling,, armed robbery, kidnapping, bereavement of parents, victimized/ abused, or who had witnessed violent actions often showed more post traumatic stress disorder of ranging degrees. Also it is evident that children who had experienced separation from parents and are displaced exhibited more depressive symptoms than those who remained with their parents. For example Neil (2005, Santrock 2007, Inweregbu, 2007, Nwoke,2010) reiterated that post traumatic stress disorder (PSTD) can be more pronounced in children in terms of severity of exposure, number of times and the proximity of experienced violent conflicts.

Limitation

 While the finding of this present study is informative, certain limitations must be taken into consideration. One major limitation of the work is the sample size which may not be a true representation of the population of children in Nigeria. Also the sampling population came from one state in Nigeria, Enugu State. A longitudinal study of children who have had direct experience of violent -conflict would have made a lot of difference.

 Conclusion

It is as bitter as it is painful to note that conflicts of all forms usually are initiated by adult members of the society, but it is the children and the adolescents who suffer the resultant traumatic outcomes across cultures, ethnic groups or races. They experience the negative consequences of violent conflict in their lives, their human rights are disrupted and their future hope dashed in hot conflicts. Violent conflict is an ill wind that does no good to anybody; it escalates unpleasant emotions of people and causes a lot of mental agony and psychological traumatic stress to children. All well meaning adults in the society and the three tiers of government in Nigeria should gear their efforts in peaceful decision making for the good of youngsters in general and their quality of life. For continuity to stand there is need to note that today's child is tomorrow's adult and leader, therefore children's rights, lives and goals must be respected and secured. If Nigerian children are destroyed through violent conflicts, the country is then a finished nation. Since this is the case, the best option is for people to co-habit in peace, settle their difference through peaceful negotiation without involving the youngsters, through conflict of any kind.

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