Banditry and Human Security: Implications on Mental Health

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Abstract: Transnational organized crime such as arms smuggling have facilitated the lethality, terror and audacity which banditry an organized violent crime is perpetrated. Banditry events pose a serious threat to human security especially in the areas of personal, economic, food and health security. Stress from conflicts, terrorism, economic hardship, increasing poverty and unemployment as well as violent crimes among other stressors worsen the low level of mental health in Nigeria. Scholarly attentions have majorly focused on the implications of banditry on socio-economic development, education and food security with little attention on mental health. This paper, examined the impact of banditry on mental health based on relevant related literature while life change event perspective served as the theoretical framework of the study. The paper highlights that banditry events such as loss of livelihood, rape, kidnapping and internal displacement of people, adversely affects the mental health of victims. Varying degrees of mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety and posttraumatic stress are experienced by victims with short or long term consequences depending on the level of severity of events as well as the level of victims' resilience. It is concluded that, banditry is a life change event that impact negatively on the mental health of individuals. It is recommended that, government intensify ongoing efforts to address banditry and adequate psychosocial help be provided continually by professionals, traditional and religious leaders to enable victims cope effectively.

Keywords: banditry, human security, mental health, stress and life event.

Introduction

Transnational organized crime such as arms smuggling have facilitated the lethality, terror and audacity which banditry an organized violent crime is perpetrated in North-west region of Nigeria, Okoli (2022) and the surrounding international border. Due to the cross-border nature of banditry activities between Nigeria and Niger, banditry is quickly becoming a transnational organized crime (Goodluck Jonathan, Foundation, 2022) and poses a threat to national and human security in Nigeria (Ojo, Oyewole and

Aina, 2023) especially in Northwest region of the country. The regular violent attacks and the high severity of banditry attacks have led to loss of farmland, livestock and livelihoods and have forced 6.1 million people to face food insecurity (Assessment Capacities Projects, ACAPS, 2020). Banditry has further worsened human poverty in the region as Nigeria multidimensional poverty index of 2022, reports that, the region has an estimate of 45 million poor people and experiences one of the highest levels of multidimensional poverty index 32.4% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

From the abovementioned effects of banditry, it suggest that banditry adversely affects the two components of human security which are freedom from fear and freedom from wants and it is a major threat to personal security, food security, economic security and health security. World Health Organization (WHO, 2001) submits that traumatic events from circumstances such as armed conflicts, terrorism attacks, natural disaster, violent crime among others are associated with serious mental health problems. An estimate of 15-20% of population affected by crises suffers from varying degrees of severity of mental health challenges nonetheless, the implications of these circumstances on the mental health is often ignored (Bogalyreva and Winkler, 2018).

Victims most exposed to armed conflicts were at higher risks of experiencing post traumatic stress, anxiety and suicide (Trujillo, Giraldo, Lopez, Acosta and Trujillo, 2021). Direct and indirect exposures to violent attacks have prolonged effects on mental health after 21 years of occurrence (Garcia-Vera and Sanz, 2016). For children the effect is very serious as United Nation (2020), reports that, exposure to gun violence results to irritation, high level of anxiety, isolation, less sensitize to violence, and disturbed sleep. Studies also show that, the children lived in constant fear of violence, were distressed emotionally, very aggressive and extremely sad (Bogalyreva and Winkler, 2018). Most adults exposed to terror related attacks experience anxiety, panic attacks and post-traumatic stress disorder, disturbed sleep, depression, social isolation and inability to concentrate or be motivated (Cyhlarova, Knapp and Mays, 2020).

Mental health in Nigeria is low due to stressors such as conflicts, terrorism, economic hardship, increasing poverty and unemployment as well as violent crimes amongst other stressors. Adesina, Adesanya and Olufadewa (2020) observed that, persons exposed to violent crimes and conflicts are affected with mental health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), anxiety disorder and depression. The more frequent and severe the events, the worse the mental health impact on victims. In addition, the level of resilience of victims significantly determines the extent mental health is impacted by adverse events (Scheid and Brown, 2010).

Banditry in North-Western Nigeria has elicited numerous publications in terms of its impact on socio-economic development and national security. However, limited attention has focused on banditry as a human security threat with particular emphasis on the mental health implications of banditry events. One of the significance of this

paper is the need to acknowledge the import of violent crime, such as banditry, as crucial impediments to the realization of mental health in Nigeria. This paper highlights the mental health implications of events associated with banditry such as internal displacement, rape, loss of livelihood, kidnapping and loss of dear one. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part provides a conceptual discourse that revolves mainly around the banditry, mental health and human security. The second section examines implications of banditry activities on mental health. The third and final section summarizes the key points of the paper and draws some useful recommendations on how to respond to the mental health need of the public in the hot spot areas of banditry.

Conceptual Review

Banditry

The concept of banditry in Nigeria within scholarly articles suggest that, it is a constellation violent crimes by bandits targeted at persons and property. Okoli and Okpaleke (2014) definition focused on synthesis of violent crimes that characterized banditry, target, the use or threat of force as well as the intent. Banditry entails various violent crimes such as armed robbery in market or villages, kidnapping, rape and cattle rusting that is targeted at an individual or a group of persons through the use or threat of force with the intent to intimidate or kill. Okoro (2022) definition described the nature of the crime conceived as banditry, size of perpetrators, weapon used and the location of their activities. He defined banditry as an organised crime that is violent in nature, perpetrated majorly by group of bandits using both sophisticated and unsophisticated weapons within and across the nation. The crime is characterized by destruction of properties, robbery, sexual victimization, kidnapping and killings.

Ugbomah, Omede and Ifediegwu (2022) while aligning to the definitions of the above authors included imposition of tax among the criminal activities of bandits. Banditry is an organized crime perpetrated by bandits in a single raid or following a nomadic form of appropriation that entails cattle rusting, kidnapping, armed robbery, ambushing individuals on the highways and extortion of communities through imposition of tax. From the above definitions, banditry means criminal acts by bandits which are often violent in nature and are targeted at property and person.

Human Security

Human security is a people focus security. The concept has no single definition due to the different domain of priority emphasized by authors. United Nation for Development Programme (1994) identifies two component factors of human security. The first component has to do with peoples' freedom from fear which entails that, people are protected from sudden and hurtful interferences in their daily lives. The second

component is freedom from wants which implies that people should be safe from the threats of hunger, disease, crime and repression. Human security has seven inter related parts which are: personal security, economic security, food security, health security, environment security, community security and political security.

Human security according to the Global Environmental Change and Human Security research program, has to do with the capability of individuals and communities to take action to threats on their social, human and environmental rights. The United Nation Trust Fund for Human Security focuses on empowering individuals to identify their security threats and clearly indicate how the needed changes will be realized. Human security for The United Nation Commission on human security emphasis is to protect the very important foundation of all human lives in a manner that improve human freedoms and fulfillment. Going by the various definitions of human security, it implies that human security is centered on human being as the victims and its goes beyond physical violence or physical harms (Gasper, 2011). Banditry adversely affects the two component factors of human security which are; freedom from fear and freedom from wants as individual are deprived majorly of personal security, food security, economic security and health security.

Mental Health

The concept mental health has no single definition though scholars subscribe to the idea that mental health is not simply the absence of mental illness. WHO (2004) conceptualizes mental health as not merely the lack of mental illness but it also has to do with a state of well-being in which the individual understands his or her abilities, is able to cope with the normal stress of life, work productively and contributes to the community. According to Scheid and Brown (2010), mental health is beyond the absence of disease or disorder; it entails sense of worth, mastery, and the capability to sustain meaningful relationships with others. Keyes and Michalec (2010) posit that, aside the absence of psychopathology, mental health includes the presence of adequate levels of emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

Dwelling on Keyes and Michalec (2010) definition of mental health, banditry attacks is a risk factor for reduced emotional, psychological and social wellbeing of individuals that are directly or indirectly exposed to it.

Theoretical Framework

Stress Theory

Stress theory posits that when events and strains build up in people's lives, they can overcome people's psychosocial resources and abilities to cope which can result to

mental health challenges (Thoits, 2010). Serious stressors such as being a victim of a violent crime, natural disaster, military combat, or physical or sexual abused are mostly the prevailing factors responsible for poor mental health outcomes (Dohrenwend, 2000). In the context of this study, banditry is seen as an irrepressible stressful event that poses high risk to peoples' personal, economic, food and health security. Banditry as a stressor is capable of overwhelming people ability to cope which can cause several types of mental health challenges. Thus, stress theory with particular emphasis on life change event is adopted to explain banditry implications on mental health.

Life Change Events

In the past three decades, negative life change events have been the focus of researchers' as they are highly harmful to individuals' mental health. Life change event refers to a distinct, noticeable, and objectively reportable incident that individuals need some social or psychological adjustment (Wheaton and Montazer, 2010). Banditry events is explained within the life event dimension proposed by Dohrenwend (2000) which has also been used by DeVylder, Fedina and Link (2020) to explain the impact of police violence on mental health.

Banditry event explained within the Dohrenwend's life event dimension

Dimension	Description	Relevance for banditry events
Valence	Positive or negative	Banditry events are generally of negative valence for direct and indirect victims
Fatefulness	Extent to which the event is uncontrollable as opposed to the consequences of the individual's behaviour	The context of fatefulness around banditry is that, the large ungoverned space provide ample opportunity for it to flourish, armed smuggling across porous border, greed and grievances and it is predatory crime by nature and not as a result of victims' behaviours. Although, there are certain category of people that are most likely to be victims such as vigilante group and security personnel, which suggest some degree of controllability.
Predictability	Expected likelihood of occurrence	Banditry is more common in rural areas than urban areas. In farming communities than non-farming communities. However, when bandits will attack, who the next target will be, how the attack will be carried out and where it will occur cannot be predicted. Victims least expect such attacks when they occur as seen in cases of attacks on schools, villages at night, market places and ambush of commuters on highway. Since each banditry attack is unpredictable, the level of impact on mental health also varies.

Dimension	Description	Relevance for banditry events
Magnitude	The amount of effects on one's activities as a result of experiencing the event	Banditry has substantial magnitude of effects as it led to hundreds of thousands of displaced persons as well as widows and orphans, hundreds of villages have been destroyed, many women and girls have been raped and several people loss their livelihood (Goodluck Jonathan, Foundation, 2022). Though the magnitude of the effect varies based on the circumstance, level of severity, frequency of exposure, vulnerability of victims and the level of resilience. Nonetheless, victims' ability to function effectively in daily activities is seriously hampered. Fear of re-occurrence, difficulty in meeting basic needs among dislocate families and those that loss means of livelihood, physical injuries sustained and trauma experienced from exposure to violence, rape and kidnapping as well as the grief from unexpected death of loved ones creates negative stress which impact negatively on the mental health of victims.
Centrality	Relation of the event to a persons' ability to maintain or achieve their life goals	The threat banditry pose to personal, economic, food and health security limits the ability of victims to maintain goals across various aspect of life. Educational goals especially girl child education is at risk of termination. Expansion of farming activities is highly curtailed.
Physical impact	Direct or indirect physical effects of life event	The aftermaths of banditry events such as traumatic physical injuries, loss of loved ones, internally displaced persons, rape, loss of livelihood are correlated with varieties of mental health challenges.
Specifics	Specific characteristics of the event contributes to its impact	Violence, killings, lethality, deprivations and inhuman treatment experienced by kidnapped victims, in the hands of abductor, destruction of villages, farmland and produce, cattle theft, extortion, large sum required for ransom are some of the features of banditry events that contributes to its impact on mental health.

Adapted from DeVylder, Fedina and Link (2020)

Banditry Implications on Mental Health

The mental health implications of internal displacement of persons/refugee, rape, kidnapping, loss of livelihood are examined below.

Internal Displacement of Persons (IDPs)/Refugee and effects on Mental Health

Studies globally indicate that, IDPs are very prone to mental health challenges due to the psychological and physical trauma experienced prior, during and after displacement. In addition, IDPs experience re-traumatization when they return to their area of origin (Siriwardhana and Stewart, 2012). At least in Nigeria, 453, 000 people are internally displaced and around 80,000 are refugees in Niger as at 2020 due to banditry (ACAPS, 2020). In Nigeria, stress experienced from familial separation, lack of access to basic

needs, lack of social support mechanisms (Adesina et al., 2020), difficulty in establishing a means of livelihood (Ugbomah, Omede and Ifediegwu, 2022) as well as the cumulative trauma experienced by IDPs such lose of properties, loved ones and physical injuries has led to mental health challenges such as, anxiety, depression, and post traumatic stress disorder among IDPs before and after displacement (Olufadewa, Adesina, Oladele and Ayorinde, 2022). IDPs when compared to normal residents experience significant symptom distress such as obsessive compulsive behaviour, hostility, paranoid ideation, psychoticism and neurotism (Obi-Nwosu, Charles, Chinenyenwa and Kingsley, 2016)

Rape and Mental Health Challenges Experienced By Victims

The rape of women and girls during bandit attacks as well as those kidnapped has increased. Sometimes rape is carried out as response to communities' refusal to pay the level imposed by bandits (Ojewale and Balogun, 2022). This suggests that rape is used as a weapon of terror to punish and humiliate victims. Incidence of rape has a serious traumatic experience for victims and worse more when the rape results to pregnancy. Ojo et al., (2023) submit that, in addition to the trauma, victims are denounced by communities. This is not surprising as rape decreases the prospect of marriage for girls while stigma and risk of divorce are experienced by married women (Buba, 2015).

Jose (2010) study on experiences of women who were raped during armed conflicts showed that, rape has serious negative consequences on victims' mental health depending on the nature of the event, level of individuals' vulnerability and the type of social support in the persons' environment. Emotional behaviours by victims include fear, nervousness, sadness, shame and feeling guilty. In addition, victims experience loss of interest in ordinary activities, either emotional withdrawal or excessive dependence on others.

Though some victims experience mild challenges and recover but some experience low self esteem and attempted suicide while long term impact are post traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety and sexual dysfunction (Zacchaeus and Iruo, 2020). Rape can have a long term effect on mental health of victims as Woldetsadik, Acan and Odiya (2022) reported that ten years after incidence, women that were raped during Uganda armed conflict still experienced mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression, nightmares, suicidal ideation.

Kidnapping and its effects on Mental Health

Victims kidnapped by bandits are subjected to long distance walk across difficult terrains in forest often leading to severe exhaustion. such experience in addition to starvation, deprivation of nutritious food, torture, ill health, threat of death, sexual abuse, inhumane condition of living, outrageous amount demanded for ransom or the

condition that needs to be fulfilled to gain freedom constitute traumatic experiences for victims. After regaining freedom, victims as well as family members experience mental health challenge such as post traumatic stress disorder as Aloku and Alafo (2023) findings on the extent of post traumatic stress disorder experienced by victims and their significant others in Kaduna State, showed that, mild to moderate symptoms were experienced by both victims and their significant others. Experiences include angry outburst, fear, self blame, mistrust which affected level of association with friends and a change in perception about the world been conceived as wicked.

Muhammed (2022) also found that thoughts, emotion and interaction of victims are affected post abduction. Victims' experiences include intrusive thoughts, declined in concentration, hyper vigilance and they live in fear of future occurrence. Apprehension, guilt and depression are the emotional characteristics experienced. Interaction is characterized by withdrawal and significant others are avoided. Individuals not directly exposed to banditry also experience mental health challenge. Shekwolo, Okorie, Aigboje and Yahaya (2021) revealed that, residents in areas where kidnapping is frequent experience depression due to fear of occurrence and worries about how to pay for ransom in the case of an event. Females were more depressed than males.

When kidnapping is associated with violence episode, victims experience post traumatic stress disorder while humiliating and depriving experiences lead to Stockholm syndrome. This is a situation whereby victims develop positive feelings towards their captors. When victims are held captive for a long time, such as two years, they experience an enduring personality change. This is characterized by a hostile or mistrusting worldview, hopelessness and a persistent feeling of being on edge. Children held captive for more than six months experience devastating effects such as shame, being pessimistic (Alexander and Klein, 2010). In addition, children exhibit regressive behaviours such as excessive reliance on parents, stubbornness and less use of words when communicating (Reissman, Akheter and Park, 2019).

Loss of livelihood and Effects on Mental Health

Decline in peoples' economic status deteriorates their mental health as the loss elevates distress. Loss of livelihood creates unemployment. According to Lennon and Limonic (2010) the social and economic loss experience by individuals as a result of unemployment are stressful and adversely affects their self-esteem and creates anxiety and depression.

Farmers in Nigeria are susceptible to violent attacks that results to loss of livelihood which have traumatising effects (Fadare , Zanello and Srinivasan, 2023) other threats to farmers livelihood emanate from flood, drought and pest/disease infestation nonetheless, banditry is a major threat to farmers livelihood. Igbini (2022) submits that

banditry affects farmers' livelihood as bandits kidnap farmers, seize farmland, block trade routes, burn grain silos and rustle cattle. Sanchi, Saadu, Kaka and Muhammad (2022) study revealed that banditry severely affects livelihood of crop farmers as more than 80% reported reduction in crop yield, output and income. The psychological effects experienced by farmers were mostly sleepless night, worry/anxiety and anger while majority live in fear.

Loss of cattle especially large herds of cattle as a result of exposure to conflict is associated with a higher risk of depression. Having a large herd of cattle is difficult to managed in conflict situation as cattle are prone to direct attack or can be destroyed because of emaciation and disease as a result of inaccessibility to pasture, water and other supporting inputs or services (Fadare et al., 2023).

Conclusion

The major components of human security which are freedom from fear and freedom from wants are seriously affected by banditry. Banditry events characterized by violence and terror have led to large scale destruction of life, villages and properties, traumatic injuries and disabilities, loss of livelihood, displacement of people and forced migration, traumatic experiences from kidnapping as well as intense fear of victimization among people. Banditry events are stressors as well as chronic stressors that adversely affect the mental health of individuals that are directly or indirectly exposed to the attacks. Short and long term mental health effects such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress are experienced by victims which affects their daily life and productivity. It is important that, government intensifies ongoing military and non-military efforts to address banditry. Socio-economic underpinnings of banditry such as grievances, injustice, greed, unemployment as well as governance and security infrastructure related weaknesses that enhance the activities of banditry need to be given utmost priority by the government in order to tackle banditry. Adequate psychosocial help needs to be provided continually by professionals, traditional and religious leaders to enable victims cope effectively.

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