



## IMPACT OF INSECURITY ON MENTAL HEALTH OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN IBARAPA AREA OF OYO STATE

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### ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated the impact of insecurity on the mental health of secondary school students in the Ibarapa area of Oyo State. The region in the recent past experienced heightened levels of insecurity which was majorly as a result of internal conflicts between the indigenous farmers and herders. This study explored

### INTRODUCTION

Ibarapa area of Oyo State in recent past, and in particular Igangan, which is one of the seven towns in Ibarapa has experienced a spate of insecurity majorly characterized by internal conflict between indigenous farmers and cattle-herders in the locality. Following this internal conflict, other insecurity incidents such as kidnapping, rapping, maiming, killings and other forms of violence took its toll on the residents. The impact of insecurity on individuals, particularly secondary school students has been quite significant and far-reaching as the challenges of its outcome have not only disrupted the social fabric of community but also impacted the daily lives of secondary school students in the region.

In the course of conflict situations, many people encounter different degrees of trauma which literarily means wound, especially those that have witnessed gruesome killings, violent rape and maiming of their loved ones. The World Health Organization (WHO)



the multifaceted impacts of insecurity on students' psychological well-being, using purposive sampling techniques to conduct Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with twenty-one students, having seven students in each group and an In-depth Interview with 9 students. Findings from the study highlight the pervasive influence of insecurity on students daily lives and mental health. Participants reported heightened levels of fear, anxiety, and stress due to various security challenges such as communal conflict, raping, maiming and killings through violent clashes. These feelings were compounded by a sense of vulnerability and uncertainty about personal safety, which significantly affected their ability to concentrate on academic tasks and engage effectively in school activities. The study went further to identify coping mechanisms deployed by members of the community which were not so sufficient in mitigating the long-term psychological impacts of insecurity. It recommends amongst others the need for comprehensive school-based mental health programmes, community-wide initiatives to promote safety and resilience among the students as well as implementing proactive security measures that foster supportive school environment which prioritize students' psychological well-being.

**Keywords:** Insecurity, Mental Health, Psychological Impact, Secondary School Students, Ibarapa, Oyo State

(2014) revealed that in situations of armed conflict, around 10% of the people who experience traumatic events will have serious mental health problems and another 10% will develop behaviour that will hinder their ability to function effectively. The long-term effects of trauma are significant as it affects mental health of persons that witness it which result in depression, anxiety, development of mistrust, suspicion, sense of hopelessness as well as psychosomatic problems such as insomnia among others.

WHO (2014) described mental health as an individual's overall psychological well-being which includes aspects such as one's emotional state, thought patterns and behaviour. Mental health disorders can have significant impact on



a person's daily life and functioning and may require professional treatment and support (Kabir, Jika & Yisa, 2023). Lawrence (2020) reported that victims of violence usually experience psychological distress, deep-seated fear, sleeplessness, nightmare, generalized anxiety and unexplained somatic symptoms such as body pain, stomach ache and headache. However, in order for them to navigate this situation or buffer the effect of the trauma, many individuals, especially secondary school students in insecure communities tend to adopt coping behaviour to help mitigate the psychological effect of the armed conflict situation they have been exposed to over time.

While different studies (Jimoh, Gyan & Adeniyi, 2022; Basiru, 2024; Loofbourrow & Scherr, 2023; Nwogu, Osere & Ukwu, 2022) have explored the impact of insecurity on various populations including adults and communities, academic performance, food insecurity and so forth, research searchlight has not been particularly beamed on studies focusing on the impact of insecurity on mental health of secondary school students in Igangan town of Ibarapa area. The knowledge gained from the impact of insecurity is crucial for developing targeted interventions and support systems that can help mitigate the negative consequences of insecurity on the students' mental health.

This study therefore aims to fill this knowledge gap by investigating the relationship between insecurity and mental health among secondary school students in Ibarapa area. This study is expected to develop strategic interventions and support systems available to them in order to promote the wellbeing and resilience of the students. The findings will help inform educators, policymakers and other stakeholders on effective strategies necessary in promoting and protecting the mental wellbeing of secondary school students in the area.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of insecurity on mental health of secondary school students in Ibarapa area of Oyo state, Nigeria. The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How did the armed conflict that led to the brutal killings of indigenes of the community occur?



2. What is the extent of the effect of insecurity on the mental health of secondary school students in the community?
3. What are the coping strategies adopted by members of the community to ameliorate the impact of insecurity on secondary school students in the community?

### **Participants of the study**

A non-probability, purposive sampling technique was used to gather data for the study. In order to select the study participant, two schools, at the flashpoint of the internal conflict were purposively selected. Twenty-one students in SS3 aged between 17 and 20 years., including 10 females and 11 males were purposively drawn into the study to participate in the Focus Group Discussion having seven of the students in each group, while nine others were also brought into the study to participate in the in-depth interview sessions. The researchers ensured that ethical considerations on the study were followed by obtaining permission from the principals of the two schools, Oke Aako High School, Igangan and Igangan High School. Informed consent was also sought from the students who were made to understand the purpose of the interviews. With this knowledge, they had the choice of participating in the study voluntarily. The students were also assured of their confidentiality in participating in the study. They were made to realize that they could leave at any point they felt uncomfortable to continue. According to Krueger (1994), it was recommended that engaging homogeneous groups into an FGD study is important in obtaining rich data that will emerge from the engaged FGD participants. Thus, instead of grouping students across different classes, only students in Senior Secondary School 3 (SSS3) were chosen to participate in this study. Before the focus group interviews began, the students were informed that the interviews would be audio recorded. The focus group interviews were based on a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions. For the purpose of confidentiality, the participants identities were labelled numerically.

A one-on-one in-depth interview was also used to obtain responses from the nine participants. In-depth interview served as an important means of



obtaining rich and essential data for the study as identified by Yin (2018). The procedure for preparing and conducting interviews as determined by Creswell and Poth (2018) was followed in preparing and conducting interviews for this study. Some open-ended interview questions prepared by the researcher in order to answer the research questions in the study were

- Can you describe the experiences you had during the period of the violent internal conflict?
- How would you describe the mental health concerns you had during and after the internal conflict?

The Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and In-depth Interview which were conducted using both Yoruba and English language helped to answer the three research questions that were raised for the study. Each session lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. The elicited data were thematically analyzed.

## **Methodology**

### **Focus Group Discussion and Interview Guide**

Respondents were welcomed and thanked for participating in the discuss. The purpose of the focus group discussion, which was to explore the impact of insecurity on the mental health of secondary school students in Ibarapa area of Oyo State was explained to them. The researchers, who took turns to moderate and observe the focus group interviews introduced themselves to the participants and emphasized the importance of their honest opinion.

For the in-depth interview, each participant was with one interviewer at a time and each participant was informed that the session would be recorded. Each interviewer individually introduced themselves to the participant at the onset of each session. The purpose for the interview was reiterated to them and they were assured of the confidentiality of their identity and response. On the average, each session lasted about thirty minutes.

### **Data Analysis**

The audio recordings were saved to a protected software for its transcription. Each of the audio files were listened to in order to identify and correct any



error. While listening to the audio recording, the researchers assigned secure number to each of the participants in order to protect their identity. A further listening and review of the audio recording was done alongside the research questions taken one after the other. During this phase, the researchers listened again in order to identify emotions associated with the expressions of the participants. Meaningful units of data with each response were identified and assigned appropriate codes. The meaningful data that had common codes were organized into themes and sub-themes. These themes were named and defined to capture the essence of the participants' experiences and perspectives. The themes were then analyzed in relation to the purpose of the study. This involved examining patterns, commonalities and differences across the responses to extract meaningful insights. Based on the thematic analysis, conclusions were drawn regarding the impact of insecurity on the mental health of secondary school students in Ibarapa area of Oyo State, Nigeria. The procedure used for the analysis of data that was obtained from the Focus Group Discussion was also used for the In-depth Interview because both sampling techniques are qualitative in nature. The identified themes provided valuable insights into how the attacks and killings of indigenes occurred, effect of insecurity on the mental health of secondary school students and coping strategies that they adopted.

## RESULTS

In this section, the results are presented in line with the research questions that guided the study.

### Research Question One

The first research question sought to know how the armed conflict led to the brutal killings of the local farmers. The theme for this was emergence of attack while the sub-themes were unawareness, ignorance, oppression.

#### Unawareness

The participants noted that they all had gone to sleep when they were rudely woken up at around midnight by sporadic gunshots. Interviewee 4, Female





shared, *“It happened on Midnight of Friday / Saturday morning. We were all asleep when we heard gunshots. We first thought it was ceremonial gunshots which sometimes occur during ceremonies because there was a ceremony going on in the community that day. It was when we heard our people screaming and scampering for safety that we realized it was an attack. It was a huge pandemonium as people were caught unawares. The assailants came with sophisticated firearms while the hunters tried to defend with their local guns. The assailants were so many that they overran our community, killed and maimed many of our people”*. FGD-B, Participant 6, Female further shared *“We did not know the exact time it was. It was later we recounted that it was around 11 pm to 12 midnight on Saturday when many people had gone to sleep.*

### **Ignorance**

Furthermore, some participants revealed that they were unaware of the reason for the attacks. This can be identified from the experience of FGD-A, Participant 3, Male who shared *“We don’t know why we were attacked. I don’t know what led to the attack on our community.*

### **Oppression**

Some of the participants in the study disclosed that there had not been peaceful coexistence between the herders and the indigenes for quite a while. This was so, because the herders often waylaid them on their way to their farms. This was recalled by FGD-B, Participant 2, Male who shared *“Before the last incident, each time we went to the farm, the herders rape our sisters and mothers, hijack motorcycle from farmers, and kidnap our people on the farm. They waylay us on the way to the farm and the market. So, we are always scared and afraid of attacks”*. Interviewee 5, Male also revealed *“What I know is that for a very long time, we have not been living peacefully. Life in our village has been full of troubles. We have been attacked on the farms, attacked in the bush, women and some of our young girls have been raped, there have been cases of kidnap on the farm”*.



## Research Question Two

The second research question sought to discover how insecurity has affected the mental health of students in the community. The theme for this was mental health problems while the sub-themes that emerged were fear, anxiety, sleeplessness.

### Fear

Fear was identified to be one of the major consequences of the insecurity they experienced in the community. This was revealed from the discussion of some of the participants, one of which was FGD-A, Participant 5, Male who shared *“Occasionally, when I remember the incident and fear grips my heart, I become agitated and worried that they can come and attack us again. We often do not want to go to school because we don’t feel safe. We can’t move freely in our community. In addition to this revelation, FGD-B, Participant 3, Female explained that “We did not go to school the following Monday, and for over one month, none of us went to school as we were all full of fear. We could not go to school for more than a month. We all were in deep fear”.* These expressions of fear as discussed by participants of the focus group interview was corroborated by Interviewee 2, Male who from his opinion noted *“I still don’t feel safe even though the herders have been evicted from our community. I am afraid they might still come back to attack us again. This is why some of us have been told that we should not reveal our identity as indigenes of Igangan whenever we travel outside Ibarapa area so that we won’t be exposed to attacks by the herders or relatives in other parts of the country.*

### Anxiety

Some of the students described the constant feeling of unsettlement within them each time they or their parents had to go to the farm because of the state of uncertainty they constantly experienced. This was the reason why Interviewee 1, Male disclosed *“My father is a farmer. He plants watermelon and cucumber. Anytime he is in the farm, my mother calls him more than four times daily to be sure he is safe and has not been attacked the assailants. Our mind is not always at rest when he goes to the farm. However, after the killing that night,*





*the herders were banished from our land. We now have peace". This was further revealed by FGD-A, Participant 7, Female that "Our academic life suffered a lot. We were under serious fear and tension. In addition to this, Corp members that used to be posted to schools in our community were no longer posted by NYSC. Those that had already been posted went ahead to seek redeployment".*

### **Sleeplessness**

Some of the participants described a state of sleeplessness as one of the mental health effects of the insecurity that they experienced in the community. This was expressed by FGD-A, Participant 2, Female who noted that *"Majority of us students find it difficult to sleep as we should do and we know that it is not good for us as we are preparing for our exams. For instance, anytime I begin to read and my mind goes back to the attacks we experienced in the community, my heart will start beating fast and I will begin to think of the difficulties we faced during that period. Before I know what is happening, I would have lost focus on what I am reading"*.

Participants in the in-depth interviews frequently discussed experiences related to sleeplessness, highlighting its significant impact on their daily lives and overall well-being. This sub-theme emerged consistently across all interviews, revealing diverse perspectives and underlying factors contributing to this phenomenon. Many described difficulties falling asleep, citing worries about personal safety and insecurity in the community as primary concern. For instance, Interviewee 2, (Female) remarked that *"Sleeping at night became a difficult thing for me to do, especially immediately after the attack that night which led to the death of my friend's father who had come visiting with us the day before. I could not believe he died from the attack just like that. Although, my younger ones have been able to go to sleep at night without much fear now, I still find it very difficult to drift to sleep like I used to do before the attack of that night. Unfortunately, I always feel tired during school hours when I go to school these days.*

### **Research Question Three**

The third research question sought to know the coping strategies that were adopted by members of the community in mitigating the impact of the insecurity on the students. The theme that emerged was adopted coping strategies while the sub-themes were prayers and social support.



The participants discussed different coping strategies they utilized in response to the difficulties they experienced. These strategies were

### **Religious / Spiritual Coping (Prayers)**

Some members of the community as reported that they drew strength from their religious beliefs in prayers during challenging period. Some of participants remarked that they adopted prayers as a means of ensuring their mental balance and sanity. They took to praying because they believed they could be protected from harm and enjoy safety. This was why Interviewee 5 (Male) remarked that *“I have been so sad ever since my friend’s father was brutally killed. I see her and her brothers looking very sad all the time and I don’t know what to do to help them. Sometimes, bad thoughts enter into my mind that they might kill my father too. But I always quickly push that thought away from my mind and begin to pray to God for His protection and help for us. Anytime I finish praying, I feel better”*. This assertion was corroborated by Interviewee 6, Female who stated *“On that night that they came to attack our community, I heard footsteps and gunshot around our house and I was very afraid. I ran to my mother who was already awake and was praying quietly on her bed. I held her hands and I joined her in praying. Miraculously, they did not break into our house. Anytime I am afraid, I always pray because I know God answers prayers”*.

On his part, FGD-A, Participant 1, Male shared *“prayer and meditation are essential for me. They provide me with the needed comfort and perspective when things get tough.*

### **Social Support**

Participants identified various types and sources from which they access social support. For instance, some of the participants emphasized the importance of receiving comfort from family members, friends and significant others in the community during the difficult times. In the in-depth interview, Interviewee 2 (Male) shared that *“Each time I feel low, talking with my best friend always helps. He listens and offers reassurance which makes me feel supported”*. Interviewee 1 (Male) noted *“My family is always there to comfort me whenever I feel agitated or depressed. They don’t allow me to feel alone”*.



On the part of FGD-A, Participant 5, Male whose experience during the period was that *“I used to feel very sad about what happened in our community, but my friends usually encourage me to cheer up. Sometimes, we go ahead and play football or visit our other friends and gist. After these activities, I always feel better”*.

### Discussion of findings

Findings of this study on the theme on how the armed conflict occurred revealed that the major attack took place on a particular weekend between mid-night of Friday and Saturday when most of the residents were fast asleep. The pandemonium was initially thought to be gunshot salutes by the local hunters who usually felicitated with the celebrants through gunshot salutation. This unfortunately was not to be, as the herders unleashed terror on the hapless indigenes when they least expected such dimension of attack. This led to the scampering for safety by members of the community into nearby forests following maiming and killing of some members of the community. As a result of this attack, many of the schools remained shut for quite a while many of the students refused to return to school. Supporting this finding, Lee, Goh & Yeo (2023) reported that war situation prevents both teachers and students from getting education which is consistent with Hausler, Urban & McCorquodale (2011) who reported that insecurity has come to be associated with being an anathema to school enrollment and development. Results from this study on the theme which discussed the effect of insecurity on the mental well-being of secondary school students revealed that the students experienced intense fear, anxiety, sleeplessness, sadness, and heightened level of stress. Findings from this study is in line with the report of Lawrence (2020) on effect of war on mental health that, victims of violence report experiencing psychological distress, deep-seated fear, sleeplessness, nightmare, generalized anxiety and unexplained somatic symptoms such as body pain, stomach ache and headache. As established by this study, the effect of insecurity on the mental health of secondary school students in Ibarapa area of Oyo State is in agreement with Etenesh, Adane, Mesfin, Awgchew, Firehiwot & Mesfin (2023) who revealed that persons living in communities affected by



insecurity have reported higher levels of psychological distress, anxiety and depression compared to individuals living in secure areas.

Results of the theme on coping strategies as discussed in this study revealed that prayer was majorly identified as a coping strategy which members of the community took advantage of in mitigating the effect of the violent conflict that was experienced in the community apart from the social support they got from friends and family. Adong, Kornher, Kirui & Braun (2021) reported that it is essential to take records of all the affected families in a conflict, book them for mental, and psychological evaluation, and offer required therapy as coping mechanism. These evaluations will give a clearer picture of the humanitarian assistance programs to be introduced to the community for recovery.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study titled impact of insecurity on the mental health of secondary school students in Ibarapa area of Oyo State sheds light on the profound impact of insecurity, stemming from the armed conflict between herders and indigenous farmers on the mental well-being of secondary school students in the region. The findings underscore the pervasive psychological distress experienced by these students, ranging from anxiety and fear to depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Importantly, the research highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions and support systems within educational institutions and communities to mitigate these adverse effects. By addressing the mental health challenges worsened by insecurity, stakeholders can work towards fostering a more resilient and supportive environment for the affected students, thereby promoting their overall well-being and academic success despite the challenging circumstances they face.

### **Recommendations**

This study highlights critical insights into the profound effects of insecurity on the mental well-being of students. As a result, the following recommendations should be considered based on the findings:

1. Enhanced psychological support: Educational Psychologists should play a pivotal role in identifying and addressing mental health challenges



among students affected by insecurity. It is therefore recommended that regular psychological counselling and therapeutic sessions be integrated within schools in the area to provide psychologically supportive environment for students to express their concerns and receive appropriate guidance.

2. **Training for Educators:** Educators need specialized training to recognize symptoms of mental distress caused by insecurity. This can be in the form of workshops and seminars organized to equip them with effective strategies to support students emotionally and academically during periods of heightened insecurity.
3. **Formulation and Implementation of Policy:** Policy makers should formulate comprehensive policies that prioritize students' safety and mental health in areas affected by insecurity. These policies should include provision for increased security measures within the communities, allocation of resources for mental health services and collaboration with local authorities in ensuring secure learning environment.
4. **Engaging the Community for Support:** Engaging with local communities is crucial in fostering resilience among students through collaboration between community leaders, parents and schools in ensuring a network of support that promotes student well-being as well as address the root causes of the insecurity.
5. **Advocacy and awareness campaigns:** Stakeholders should advocate for increased awareness of the mental health challenges faced by students in insecure environments. Public campaigns can help encourage early intervention, and garner support for policy changes that prioritize students well-being.

By implementing these recommendations, it would be easier to create a safer and more supportive educational environment that promotes the holistic development of students in spite of challenging circumstances.



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