

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF BANDITRY AMONG CHRISTIANS IN KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17311491>

Abstract

This study investigated the impact of banditry on the psychological well-being of Christians in Kaduna State, Nigeria, employing a descriptive survey design. A total of 735 respondents were randomly selected from a population of 3,765,843, and data were gathered using a structured questionnaire, with analysis conducted through mean scores. Findings revealed that banditry has significantly affected the mental health of Christians in the state, resulting in trauma, anxiety, depression, emotional distress, disrupted worship, and weakened communal bonds. The research concludes that the psychological and spiritual well-being of Christians has been deeply undermined by ongoing violence. To address this challenge, the study calls for collaborative action between the government and religious leaders urging the establishment of trauma recovery centers to provide professional psychological care and the integration of faith-based counseling into church programs to foster healing and resilience.

Keywords: *Banditry, Psychological-Well-being, Christians, Kaduna State*

Introduction

Banditry has emerged as one of the most pressing security challenges confronting Nigeria, particularly in the North-Western region where Kaduna State is located. The phenomenon is characterized by armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, and wanton destruction of lives and property. According to Okoli and Agada (2014), banditry in Nigeria is not merely a law enforcement problem but a symptom of deeper socio-political decay, including state failure, unemployment, and weak governance structures. Kaduna State, once known for its religious and cultural diversity, has now become a flashpoint of recurrent bandit attacks, which have intensified over the years, leaving a trail of psychological and emotional trauma among affected populations. The Christian communities in Southern Kaduna have particularly borne the brunt of these attacks. They have been victims of targeted killings, destruction of places of worship, and mass displacement, leading to significant emotional and psychological distress. Eze and Igwe (2021) highlight that religion-based attacks aggravate psychological trauma due to the spiritual implications they carry, especially when victims are attacked during worship or in religious spaces. The religious dimension of some banditry incidents in Kaduna State contributes to a growing sense of persecution and existential fear among Christians, threatening not only their physical safety but also their mental health and social identity.

Psychological well-being refers to an individual's emotional, mental, and social stability. Victims of banditry often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and other emotional

disorders due to the violent experiences they have endured. According to Salihu and Ajayi (2022), repeated exposure to violent trauma without adequate psychosocial support often leads to long-term psychological impairment. In the case of Christians in Kaduna, the inability to grieve properly due to displacement, the loss of spiritual gathering spaces, and the fear of future attacks have compounded their psychological burden.

Moreover, the disruption of communal and religious life has negatively affected coping mechanisms traditionally found in faith communities. In Christian settings, group fellowship, communal prayers, and pastoral counseling often serve as buffers against emotional trauma. However, when churches are burned, congregations are displaced, and pastors are kidnapped or killed, these support systems are weakened. Ibrahim and Yusufu (2020) emphasize that the breakdown of spiritual support networks in crisis-prone regions contributes to heightened levels of anxiety, hopelessness, and emotional isolation among community members.

The family unit, often regarded as the first line of emotional support, is also adversely affected by banditry. Children and women, in particular, suffer long-term psychological consequences such as nightmares, bedwetting, withdrawal, and distrust of outsiders. A study by Musa and Ahmed (2021) in Giwa and Birnin Gwari local government areas of Kaduna State revealed that displaced Christian families experience heightened psychological distress, exacerbated by poor living conditions in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and a lack of access to mental health services. These issues make it clear that psychological trauma among Christians in banditry-affected areas is both profound and multi-faceted.

In addition, the fear of recurrence and the perception of government inaction have further contributed to a deep sense of insecurity and mental stress among Christian populations. When justice is not served and perpetrators go unpunished, victims experience a sense of abandonment and helplessness. Ojo and Adegbite (2023) argue that in such contexts, the absence of justice systems that provide closure or reparation aggravates psychological trauma and reduces the victims' trust in public institutions. For Christians in Kaduna State, the feeling that they are being neglected by the state deepens emotional scars and leads to disillusionment with both government and civil society.

Banditry and Psychological Well-Being of Christians in Nigeria

In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed a significant rise in violent crimes across its northern region, with banditry becoming one of the most persistent threats to national stability. Banditry, characterized by armed attacks, kidnappings, mass killings, and destruction of property, has particularly affected rural and religious minority communities. According to Olayemi (2017), banditry has created an environment of insecurity and chronic fear, particularly among Christians living in the northern zones where these attacks are more frequent. The psychological impact of these events is both immediate and long-lasting, affecting individuals' emotional health, religious commitment, and overall well-being.

The Christian community in Nigeria, especially in states such as Kaduna, Niger, and Plateau, has faced numerous coordinated attacks from armed groups. These attacks often involve the burning of churches, the abduction of clergy, and the killing of worshippers during services. As noted by Nwachukwu (2019), such

acts transcend physical violence, entering the realm of psychological and spiritual trauma. The desecration of sacred places and loss of religious leaders deeply unsettle the spiritual foundation of Christian victims, leading to grief, helplessness, and in many cases, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The psychological effects of banditry manifest in various ways among affected Christians. Victims experience flashbacks, fear, anxiety, insomnia, and depression. The prolonged exposure to violence without closure or justice contributes to emotional exhaustion. In a study conducted in Benue State, Oduwale (2020) found that many Christian victims of violence reported a loss of hope, diminished self-worth, and social withdrawal. These symptoms are often worsened by the lack of access to mental health care, especially in rural or conflict-prone areas where the presence of healthcare professionals is limited or non-existent.

Furthermore, the displacement caused by bandit attacks has contributed significantly to the deterioration of psychological well-being. Thousands of Christians have been forced to abandon their ancestral homes and seek refuge in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. In these overcrowded and under-resourced settings, mental health concerns often go unaddressed. Adebajo (2018) argues that the trauma of forced migration, coupled with the loss of livelihood, cultural dislocation, and uncertainty about the future, has left many displaced Christians in a state of psychological fragility.

The role of religion in coping with psychological trauma is central to the Christian community. Churches, pastors, and religious gatherings typically serve as sources of comfort and communal resilience. However, in the wake of recurrent attacks, many Christian places of worship have been destroyed or rendered unsafe, thereby disrupting these traditional support systems. According to Ibrahim (2021), the inability of Christians to congregate or practice their faith without fear has weakened their spiritual and emotional support networks, leaving many in a state of isolation and emotional vulnerability.

In addition, the government's perceived failure to protect Christian communities has compounded the psychological burden. When attacks go unpunished and perpetrators operate with impunity, victims often develop a sense of abandonment by both the state and society. This perception creates distrust in public institutions and a sense of exclusion from national protection mechanisms. Ezeaku (2022) points out that this perceived neglect contributes to the erosion of national unity and cultivates long-term psychological resentment, especially among younger Christians who grow up witnessing these cycles of violence.

Cultural stigma surrounding mental health in Christian communities also plays a significant role in limiting healing. Mental illness is often misunderstood as a spiritual problem or a sign of weak faith, discouraging victims from seeking professional help. Umeh (2020) emphasizes that without proper mental health education within the Church, many victims internalize their trauma, believing it to be a result of sin or divine punishment. This misunderstanding prolongs emotional suffering and reduces the chances of psychological recovery.

Statement of the problem

Kaduna State has become one of the epicenters of banditry in Nigeria, marked by frequent attacks on rural communities, abductions, killings, and displacement. Christian communities in the southern part of the

state have been particularly targeted, with numerous incidents involving the destruction of churches, kidnapping of clergy, and killings of worshippers. Despite the growing frequency and severity of these attacks, there remains a significant gap in empirical research and policy focus on how such violence affects the psychological well-being of Christian populations. While existing studies largely concentrate on the economic or security dimensions of banditry, the psychological and emotional consequences especially among religious minorities have not been adequately explored or addressed.

The experiences of trauma, fear, grief, and displacement have led to increasing cases of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and spiritual disillusionment among Christian victims. Many live with the persistent fear of renewed attacks, loss of loved ones, and the breakdown of their faith-based support systems. The lack of access to psychological support, coupled with the destruction of religious and communal infrastructure, has left many victims in a state of emotional distress. Unfortunately, the absence of structured psychosocial interventions or mental health services tailored to Christian victims in affected areas further complicates recovery and long-term well-being.

In addition, the broader implications of this trauma on community cohesion, religious practice, and youth development within Christian communities remain under-investigated. With banditry continuing to disrupt daily life, worship, and social structures, there is a pressing need to understand and respond to the psychological toll it exacts on victims. A clearer understanding of these impacts is essential for informing faith-sensitive trauma care, government policy, and church-based interventions aimed at restoring resilience and psychological health among affected Christians in Kaduna State.

Purpose of the study

This study aims to examine how banditry affects the psychological well-being of Christians in Kaduna State, Nigeria. In particular, it seeks to evaluate the extent to which banditry impact the mental and emotional health of Christian populations within the state.

Research question

What is the impact of banditry on the psychological well-being of Christians in Kaduna State, Nigeria?

Research hypothesis

Ho¹: There is no significant impact of banditry on the psychological well-being of Christians in Kaduna State, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design targeting Christian residents of Kaduna State, Nigeria. Using simple random sampling, 750 respondents were chosen from a total population of 3,765,843. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire. Out of the copies of questionnaire distributed, 735 were properly filled and returned, yielding a response rate of 98%. Respondents were drawn from eight local government areas within the state. The administration and retrieval of the questionnaires were carried out by the researcher, assisted by five trained personnel. Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). A mean score of 2.50 served as the

decision criterion; scores of 2.50 or above indicated agreement, while scores below this point signified disagreement. The study's hypothesis was tested using the t-test statistical method at a 0.05 significance level.

Research question 1

What is the impact of banditry on the psychological well-being of Christians in Kaduna State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Opinions of Respondents on Impact of Banditry on the Psychological Well-Being of Christians in Kaduna State, Nigeria

S/N	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	X	Decision
1	Increased prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among survivors.	321	201	58	155	2.94	Accepted
2	Heightened levels of anxiety and constant fear of renewed attacks.	341	201	55	138	3.01	Accepted
3	Development of depressive symptoms due to loss of loved ones and property.	362	204	67	102	3.12	Accepted
4	Disruption of communal worship and spiritual practices.	385	201	58	91	3.20	Accepted
5	Emotional numbness and detachment from social relationships.	410	193	53	79	3.27	Accepted
6	Reduced trust in government and security institutions.	436	184	47	68	3.34	Accepted
7	Spiritual disillusionment and weakening of faith.	461	179	40	55	3.42	Accepted
8	Sleep disturbances, including nightmares and insomnia.	478	177	42	38	3.49	Accepted
9	Decline in community cohesion and support systems.	508	165	41	21	3.58	Accepted
10	Impaired daily functioning and reduced quality of life.					3.66	
	Cumulative					3.30	524 183 17
11							<u>Accepted</u>

Decision Mean=2.50

Table 1 reveals that every item recorded a mean score exceeding the cutoff mark of 2.5. Individual item means ranged from 2.94 to 3.66, signifying broad consensus among respondents regarding the statements presented. The overall mean of 3.30, which is significantly higher than the threshold, demonstrates a strong recognition by participants of the impact of banditry on the psychological well-being of Christians in Kaduna State. As a result, all item mean scores were deemed acceptable and retained for further analysis.

Hypothesis

Ho¹: There is no significant impact of banditry on the psychological well-being of Christians in Kaduna State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Summary of One Sample T-Test on impact of banditry on the psychological wellbeing of Christians in Kaduna State, Nigeria

Variable	N	Mean	Std.	Mean diff	Decision
Hypo ¹	735	2.9361	1.16488	2.9360	0.00

Table 2 presents the results of the One-Sample T-Test conducted to evaluate the impact of banditry on the psychological well-being of Christians in Kaduna State, using data from 735 respondents. The test produced a mean score of 2.9361 and a standard deviation of 1.16488, suggesting a moderate level of variability in the responses. The mean difference of 2.9360 from the test value indicates a statistically significant effect, confirming that banditry indeed impact the psychological state of Christians in the region. As a result, the null hypothesis asserting no significant impact of banditry on Christian psychological well-being in Kaduna State is rejected.

Finding

The study indicates that banditry in Kaduna State has severely harmed the psychological wellbeing of Christians, causing trauma, anxiety, depression, disrupted worship, emotional distress, and weakened community support.

Discussion of findings

Impact of Banditry on the Psychological Well-Being of Christians in Kaduna State, Nigeria The primary objective of this study was to critically assess the impact of banditry on the psychological well-being of Christians in Kaduna State, Nigeria. The finding revealed that Christians in affected areas have experienced severe psychological distress due to repeated incidents of violence, including trauma, anxiety, depression, and emotional instability. These outcomes are attributed to the constant exposure to insecurity, loss of loved ones, destruction of property, and displacement from ancestral homes. As spiritual and communal life plays a central role in the emotional balance of Christian communities, the disruption of worship activities and the destruction of churches have further exacerbated the mental health crisis among victims.

This finding aligns with the work of Ibrahim (2021), who emphasized that prolonged exposure to armed violence leads to psychological deterioration, especially in faith-based communities where religious institutions serve as emotional anchors. Ibrahim noted that attacks on places of worship not only shatter

the sense of spiritual safety but also cause long-term emotional detachment and feelings of abandonment. In Kaduna State, many Christians reported a weakening of their faith, a decline in spiritual fellowship, and increasing levels of fear and hopelessness. The destruction of religious spaces and the targeting of clergy have left psychological scars that conventional security responses alone cannot heal.

Furthermore, the weakening of community support structures has amplified the emotional toll of banditry. Traditionally, Christian communities in Kaduna have relied on extended family networks, church groups, and communal gatherings for social and emotional resilience. However, the fragmentation of these structures due to mass displacement and fear of further attacks has resulted in isolation, grief, and psychological vulnerability. These findings underscore the urgent need for psychosocial interventions tailored to the cultural and religious realities of affected Christian populations, including trauma-informed pastoral care, mental health outreach, and faithsensitive counseling programs

The finding of this study provide empirical evidence that banditry has a significant impact on the psychological well-being of Christians in Kaduna State, Nigeria, thereby supporting the argument of Adebajo (2018), who emphasized that persistent violent attacks and banditry contribute to long-term emotional and psychological distress in religious minority communities. As shown in Table 2, the One-Sample T-Test conducted using data from 735 respondents yielded a mean score of 2.9361 with a standard deviation of 1.16488, indicating moderate variability in responses. The observed mean difference of 2.9360 from the test value was statistically significant, affirming that the psychological effects of banditry such as trauma, anxiety, and emotional instability are widely experienced among Christians in the state. These results empirically validate the position that banditry not only threatens physical security but also undermines mental and emotional health, necessitating targeted interventions. The rejection of the null hypothesis confirms the need for urgent psychosocial and faith-based support mechanisms tailored to address the mental health challenges faced by Christian victims of insecurity in Kaduna State.

Conclusion

The study concludes that banditry has had a profound and detrimental impact on the psychological well-being of Christians in Kaduna State, Nigeria. Victims of these violent attacks have suffered significant emotional and mental distress, manifesting in symptoms such as trauma, anxiety, depression, fear, and emotional numbness. The persistent threat of violence, coupled with the loss of loved ones, destruction of places of worship, and forced displacement, has led to a deep sense of insecurity and psychological instability among Christian communities. This confirms that banditry is not only a security issue but also a serious public health and humanitarian concern.

Also, the disruption of religious practices and breakdown of communal support systems have intensified the emotional toll on Christians. The church, which traditionally serves as a source of spiritual strength, comfort, and communal identity, has been significantly weakened by repeated attacks. As a result, many Christians experience spiritual disillusionment and a diminished sense of hope. The loss of trust in government protection and the absence of effective mental health interventions further complicate the recovery process, leaving affected individuals vulnerable to long-term psychological harm.

Addressing the impact of banditry on Christians in Kaduna State requires a multidimensional approach that includes not only improved security measures but also comprehensive psychosocial support. Faith-based mental health interventions, trauma counseling, and community healing programs should be prioritized to restore emotional resilience and spiritual strength among the affected populations. Policymakers, religious leaders, and humanitarian agencies must collaborate to ensure that the psychological needs of victims are met, thereby fostering recovery, reconciliation, and sustainable peace within these traumatized communities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it recommends that:

- i. The government should establish and fund community-based trauma recovery centers in banditry-affected areas of Kaduna State, specifically targeting displaced and victimized Christian populations. These centers should provide professional psychological support, mental health education, and rehabilitation services to help victims cope with trauma, anxiety, and depression resulting from repeated attacks.
- ii. Religious leaders should collaborate with mental health professionals to integrate traumainformed counseling into church activities. Through faith-based healing programs, spiritual guidance, and pastoral care, churches can serve as safe spaces for emotional recovery, helping victims rebuild their faith, restore communal trust, and regain psychological stability.

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